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Moral sentiment and moral judgment in Hume.

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MORAL SENTIMENT AND MORAL JUDGMENT IN HUME

A Dissertation Presented

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ABSTRACT

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Aside from several short essays, the sources of Hume's ethics are limited to two: A Treatise of Human Nature (1739 - 1740), and An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751). These comprise several hundred pages in which Hume investigates the nature of "moral sentiments" and moral evaluations; yet, even a careful study of this material does not make it clear just what Hume takes these to be. This has resulted in almost as many different interpretations of Hume on these issues as there have been commentators.

With regard to the moral sentiment itself, there are questions both as to its nature and its origin. Concerning the former question, what kind of a feeling is the moral sentiment? Is it, for Hume, an emotion (or "passion") or something akin to sensation? In the first part of this thesis I will show that Hume is inconsistent in attempting to maintain both that the moral sentiment is a kind of pleasure or pain and that it is a genuine emotion or passion.

The second, and I think more important, issue concerning Hume's moral sentiment is its origin. Hume is almost universally interpreted as holding a moral sense theory. In such a theory the

moral sentiment is taken to be a unique kind of feeling, sensibly different from all other kinds, which is experienced when contemplating certain actions and characters. This moral feeling is said to issue from a moral sense, an "internal" counterpart to the physical senses; whereas our physical senses are sensitive to external objects, our moral sense is affected by the ideas of actions and characters.

I will argue in this thesis that, contrary to the usual interpretations, Hume is not developing a moral sense theory in the Treatise. Though Hume himself refers on occasion to the workings of a moral sense, it seems clear to me that he is there referring only to what is commonly accepted as being the results of a moral sense. Rather than countenancing the existence of a mysterious internal faculty which produces our moral sentiments, Hume's third book of the Treatise is largely devoted, I believe, to an "explication" and a "resolution" of the so-called "moral sense" into the most basic principles of human nature. On the interpretation I shall present in this thesis, the moral sentiment is no longer taken to be a sensibly unique feeling which issues from a distinct faculty; rather, the very basic and instinctive human feelings of propensity for pleasure and aversion to pain are, under certain restrictive conditions, defined by Hume to be moral sentiments.

The next issue to be considered is the connection between

moral sentiments and moral evaluations in Hume. The most common interpretations of Hume on this question can be divided into two general classes. According to the first, a moral evaluation consists in the very experiencing of the moral sentiment. Although there is strong textual support for this view, I shall argue in this thesis that such an interpretation is not the most consistent that can be given, relative to other things Hume has to say concerning the nature of moral evaluation. My main argument for this will be based on Hume's several indications that our moral sentiments in themselves are frequently not sufficient indicators of moral value, and that we can make a moral evaluation without experiencing a moral sentiment at all. This suggests that, for Hume, a moral evaluation need not consist in a mere feeling or sentiment, as this first interpretation holds.

We are thus led to the second type of interpretation of Hume on the nature of moral evaluation, in which a moral evaluation is an actual judgment about what sort of (moral) sentiment would result from the contemplation of a certain character or action. Once again, though there is textual support for this interpretation, I will show that it too must be rejected. Roughly, my argument will be this. Hume clearly and frequently denies that moral judgments are "conclusions of reason." Now a conclusion of reason for Hume is the

belief in (or assent to) a proposition. But the distinguishing characteristic of this second interpretation is the claim that a moral judgment for Hume involves the assent to a certain factual proposition. Therefore, we must reject this interpretation as being inconsistent with one of Hume's clearest requirements for moral judgments.

I will then offer my own interpretation of Hume on moral judgment, one which seems to share the strengths of the two standard accounts, while avoiding those inconsistencies which ultimately caused their rejection. In my interpretation I attempt to strike that balance between feeling and judging, between passion and reason, that Hume seems to be seeking; whether my account does more closely fit what Hume says must, in the end, be decided by the reader.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aside from several short essays, the sources of Hume's ethics are limited to two: A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-1740), and An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751). These comprise several hundred pages in which Hume investigates the nature of "moral sentiments" and moral evaluations; yet, even a careful study of this material does not make it clear just what Hume takes these to be. This has resulted in almost as many different interpretations of Hume on these issues as there have been commentators.

With regard to the moral sentiment itself, there are questions both as to its nature and its origin. Concerning the former question, what kind of a feeling is the moral sentiment? Is it, for Hume, an emotion (or "passion") or something akin to sensation? In the first part of this thesis I will show that Hume is inconsistent in attempting to maintain both that the moral sentiment is a kind of pleasure or pain and that it is a genuine emotion or passion.

The second, and I think more important, issue concerning Hume's moral sentiment is its origin. Hume is almost universally

interpreted as advocating what is called a "moral sense" theory.[1] Such theories may take a variety of forms. However, they have in common the contention that the moral feeling is a unique kind of feeling, sensibly different from all other kinds, which is often experienced when contemplating certain actions and characters. In such theories this moral feeling is said to issue from a moral sense, which is taken to be an "internal" counterpart to the physical senses; whereas our physical senses are sensitive to external objects, our moral sense is affected by the ideas of actions and characters.

I will argue in this thesis that, contrary to the usual interpretations, Hume is not developing a moral sense theory in the Treatise. Though Hume himself refers on occasion to the workings of a moral sense, it seems clear to me that he is there referring only to what is commonly accepted as being the results of a moral sense. Rather than countenancing the existence of a mysterious internal faculty which produces our moral sentiments, Hume's third book of the Treatise is largely devoted, I believe, to an "explication" and a "resolution" of the so-called "moral sense" into the most basic principles of human nature. On the interpretation I shall present in this thesis, the moral sentiment is no longer taken to be a sensibly unique feeling which issues from a distinct faculty; rather, the very basic and instinctive human feelings of propensity

for pleasure and aversion to pain are, under certain restrictive conditions, defined by Hume to be moral sentiments.

The next issue to be considered is the connection between moral sentiments and moral evaluations in Hume. The most common interpretations of Hume on this question can be divided into two general classes. According to the first, a moral evaluation consists in the experiencing of the moral sentiment; the details of such an interpretation will vary according to the commentator's understanding of the nature and origin of the moral sentiment. Such an interpretation of Hume on moral evaluation is found in several places.[2] There are numerous passages in Hume which can be taken to support this "Emotionist" interpretation, as Páll Árdal terms it:

> So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it (T, p. 469).[3]
>
> To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration (T, p. 472).
>
> Language must ... invent a peculiar set of terms in order to express those universal sentiments of censure or approbation which arise from humanity, or from views of general usefulness and its contrary (I, p. 95).
>
> In moral deliberations ... all the circumstances of the case are to be laid before us ere we can fix any sentence of blame or approbation ... The approbation which then ensues cannot be the work of the judgment but of the heart; and it is not a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment (I, p. 188).

Such passages constitute strong support for the plausibility of the Emotionist interpretation of moral evaluation in Hume. Nevertheless, in this thesis I shall maintain that this interpretation is not the most consistent that can be given, relative to other things Hume has to say concerning the nature of moral evaluation. My main argument for this will be based on Hume's several indications that our moral sentiments in themselves are frequently not sufficient indicators of moral value, and that we can make a moral evaluation without experiencing a moral sentiment at all. For example:

> In general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind. But these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain'd in one point of view. Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable (T, p. 582)

> The case is the same, as when we correct the different sentiments of virtue, which proceed from its different distances from ourselves. The passions do not always follow our corrections; but these corrections serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue (T, p. 585)

> The case is here the same as in our judgments concerning external bodies. All objects seem to diminish by their distance: But tho' the appearance of objects to our senses be the original standard, by which we judge of them, yet we do not say, that they actually diminish by the distance; but correcting the appearance by reflection, arrive at a more constant and

> establish'd judgment concerning them. In like manner, tho' sympathy be much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and a sympathy with persons remote from us much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous; yet we neglect all these differences in our calm judgments concerning the characters of men (T, p. 603)
>
> There is no necessity that a generous action, barely mentioned in an old history or remote gazette, should communicate any strong feelings of applause and admiration. Virtue, placed at such a distance, is like a fixed star which, though to the eye of reason it may appear as luminous as the sun in his meridian, is so infinitely removed as to affect the senses neither with light nor heat (I, p. 57)

These and other passages suggest that, for Hume, a moral evaluation need not consist in a mere feeling or sentiment, as the Emotionist interpretation holds.

This leads to the second type of interpretation of the nature of moral evaluation in Hume, which Árdal terms the "Reflectivist" account. On this type of interpretation, moral evaluations are actual judgments that something is the case. Such an interpretation is suggested by passages such as the following:

> In like manner [to that of moral determinations], external beauty is determin'd merely by pleasure; and 'tis evident, a beautiful countenance cannot give so much pleasure, when seen at the distance of twenty paces, as when it is brought nearer to us. We say not, however, that it appears to us less beautiful: Because we know what effect it will have in such a position, and by that reflexion we correct its momentary appearance (T, p. 582).
>
> Our servant, if diligent and faithful, may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than Marcus Brutus, as represented

> in history; but we say not upon that account, that the former character is more laudable than the latter. We know, that were we to approach equally near to that renown'd patriot, he wou'd command a much higher degree of affection and admiration (T, p. 582).
>
> We blame equally a bad action, which we read of in history, with one perform'd in our neighborhood t'other day: The meaning of which is, that we know from reflexion, that the former action wou'd excite as strong sentiments of disapprobation as the latter, were it plac'd in the same position (T, p. 584).

In his Five Types of Ethical Theory, C. D. Broad gives a Reflectivist interpretation of Hume on moral evaluation. Broad argues that, for Hume, to evaluate x as virtuous (vicious) is to judge that "x is such that the contemplation of it would call forth an emotion of approval (disapproval) in all or most men." This kind of interpretation, however, is inadequate; as I shall later show, it is not, according to Hume, that what most men approve is thereby virtuous. Rather, it is that, owing to the similarity in the emotional constitution of all humans, most men's moral determinations do in fact agree.

A more plausible Reflectivist interpretation is given by Geoffrey Hunter when he attributes to Hume the view that "a moral judgment states that there is a causal relation between the contemplation by the speaker of some actual or imagined state of affairs and a certain sort of feeling or sentiment that he has when he does the contemplation."[4] However, Hunter's formulation fails to emphasize

that the "contemplation by the speaker" must be of a very special sort - namely, contemplation from the moral point of view. What this entails will also be a topic of concern in this thesis. Rachael M. Kydd remedies this deficiency in her (Reflectivist) interpretation of Hume: for one to judge that x is good is for one to judge that "x is the kind of thing which, considered without regard to the special relation in which it stands to my personal interests, arouses feelings of pleasure in me or any other disinterested spectator of like susceptibilities."[5]

Yet, I will show that all such Reflectivist interpretations must be rejected also. Roughly, my argument will be this. Hume clearly and frequently denies that moral judgments are "conclusions of reason." Now a conclusion of reason for Hume is the belief in (or assent to) a proposition. But the distinguishing characteristic of a Reflectivist interpretation is the claim that a moral judgment for Hume involves the assent to a certain factual proposition. Therefore, we must reject all Reflectivist interpretations as being inconsistent with one of Hume's clearest requirements for moral judgments.

I will then give my own interpretation of Hume on moral judgment, one which seems to share the strengths of both the Emotionist and the Reflectivist accounts, but which avoids those inconsistencies which ultimately caused their rejection. Any such attempt must

reconcile the following strains in Hume:

> Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of (T, p. 470).
>
> The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason (T, p. 458).
>
> 'twere impossible we cou'd ever make use of language, or communicate our sentiments to one another, did we not correct the momentary appearances of things, and overlook our present situation (T, p. 582).
>
> The passions do not always follow our corrections; but these corrections serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue (T, p. 585).

The Emotionist account goes wrong by emphasizing the former two notions at the expense of the latter two, while the Reflectivist interpretation makes the reverse mistake. In my interpretation I attempt to strike that balance that Hume seems to be seeking; whether my account does more closely fit what Hume says must, in the end, be decided by the reader.

REFERENCES

[1]For example: John Laird, Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature (London, 1932), pp. 215-218; Norman Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London, 1964), pp. 23-44; Páll A. Árdal, Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise (Edinburgh, 1966), chapter VI; R. David Broiles, The Moral Philosophy of David Hume (The Hague, 1964), pp. 27 ff.

[2]For example: William K. Frankena, Ethics (Englewood Cliffs, 1963), pp. 91-92; David Hume, Of the Standard of Taste and other Essays, ed. and intro. by John W. Lenz (New York, 1965) p. XVI; Árdal, pp. 194 ff.

[3]Abbreviations used in this text:
T for Hume's A Treatise of Human Nature, L. A. Selby-Bigge edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973; I for Hume's An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. and intro. by Charles W. Hendel, Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., New York, 1957; IU for Hume's An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. and intro. by Charles W. Hendel, Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., New York, 1955.

[4]Geoffrey Hunter, "Hume on Is and Ought," in The Is-Ought Question, ed. by W. D. Hudson (Bristol, 1969), p. 62.

[5]Rachael M. Kydd, Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise (New York, 1964), p. 172.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF THE MORAL SENTIMENT

1

Although I will later argue that it is Hume's view that one need not be experiencing the moral sentiment in order to make a moral judgment, the concept of the moral sentiment is involved in such a judgment. Moreover, one who had never experienced the moral sentiment (although Hume doubts the existence of such men) could not have grounds for making a moral judgment, for he would lack the experiential evidence necessary to support it. In the present chapter I will investigate the nature of this moral sentiment.

Hume classifies the objects of human consciousness, which he calls "perceptions," into two kinds: impressions and ideas.

> Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning . . . (T, p. 1).

The moral sentiment is, according to Hume, an impression. In sections 2 and 3 of this chapter I will inquire into the kind of impression Hume takes the moral sentiment to be, and I will argue that Hume's description of the moral sentiment both as a kind of pleasure (or pain) and as a passion involves him in an inconsistency. However,

in the present section I will be concerned with Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas. This will be important not only to our present understanding of the nature of impressions themselves, but in Chapter III where the conversion of an idea into an impression through sympathy is examined, and later in Chapter VI, where it will become necessary to distinguish a moral sentiment from the idea of a moral sentiment.

Impressions and ideas may be simple or complex, where a simple impression has no other impression as a constituent, and a complex impression is one which is not simple; the distinction is analogous for ideas. Hume's thorough-going empiricism finds expression in statements to the effect that "all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" (T, p. 4). A complex idea might not itself "exactly represent" any prior impression, but the simple ideas which are the ultimate constituents of the complex ideas must.

It is one of Hume's most critical failings that he does not give an adequate account of the difference between impressions and ideas: are they different in kind or merely in degree? Hume often tends to stress the difference as one of degree:

Thus in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent

> emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: As on the other hand it sometimes happens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas (T, p. 2).
>
> All the perceptions of the mind are of two kinds, viz. impressions and ideas, which differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and vivacity (T, p. 96).

This suggests the following interpretation. All human perceptions are of the same kind; however, perceptions can differ in their strength or intensity. On the scale of intensities there is an idealized boundary. All perceptions with intensities that fall below this line are classified as ideas, while all perceptions with intensities above the line are classified as impressions. Thus, on this interpretation, the most intense idea is less intense than the least intense impression.

It is clear that this simple picture will not do for Hume. In the first place, Hume's very definition of an idea introduces a kind distinction between impressions and ideas: "By ideas I mean the faint images of [impressions] in thinking and reasoning" (T, p. 1). Not only are ideas less lively than impressions, but "all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" (T, p. 4). Hume maintains that, in some sense, ideas are representative while impressions are not; this is not consistent with maintaining that the only difference between impressions and ideas

is "force and vivacity."

The intensity interpretation is also inconsistent with Hume's treatment of belief. Hume's doctrine of belief is highly complex, and undergoes alterations as the Treatise progresses. Here I can do no more than sketch enough of the doctrine to show its incompatibility with the intensity view of the distinction between impressions and ideas.

The objects of belief for Hume are propositions; he begins an investigation of "the nature of the idea or belief" by asking "Wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition?" (T, p. 95). Hume equates a proposition with a set of one or more ideas; he tells us that for you and I to entertain the same proposition is for you and I to have the same ideas (T, p. 95). The problem Hume poses is this. Quite clearly, you and I can entertain the same proposition in that we can "conceive the (same) ideas"; nevertheless, your conception may be attended with belief while mine is not. What, then, would constitute such a difference in our conceptions?

Hume's answer is that a "belief is a more vivid and intense conception of an idea" (T, p. 103). As an illustration of this, Hume offers the following:

> This definition will also be found to be entirely conformable to everyone's feeling and experience. Nothing is more evident, than that those ideas, to which we assent, are more strong,

> firm and vivid, than the loose reveries of a castlebuilder. If one person sits down to read a book as a romance, and another as true history, they plainly receive the same ideas, and in the same order; nor does the incredulity of the one, and the belief of the other hinder them from putting the very same sense upon their author. His words produce the same ideas in both; tho' his testimony has not the same influence on them. The latter has a more lively conception of all the incidents (T, pp. 97-98).

Hume realizes, however, that there can be variations in the liveliness of an idea without variations in belief. For instance, a science fiction writer's conception of a colony on Mars will be far more vivid and lively than my own, though neither one of us believes that such a colony exists. Again, the liveliness of my own conception of such a colony may vary from time to time, though at no time do I believe that any such colony exists. The next question Hume must answer is: how lively or intense must an idea be in order to constitute a belief?

Hume begins to answer this question by observing that an idea which constitutes a belief affects our emotions and actions in a way which a mere idea does not. When I merely entertain the thought of a lion bearing down on me, my emotions and behavior remain unaffected; but if I believe that such a thing is actually happening, I will most probably feel fear and run. The latter is to be compared with a situation in which I <u>see</u> a lion bearing down on me (i. e., in Hume's terminology, I have the impression of a lion bearing down on

me); there can be little doubt how such an impression will affect me. The effects of the belief resemble the effects of the impression, and this provides Hume with an essential clue:

> The effect, then, of belief is to raise up a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow on it a like influence on the passions. This effect it can only have by making an idea approach an impression in force and vivacity. For as the different degrees of force make all the original difference betwixt an impression and an idea, they must of consequence be the source of all the differences in the effects of these perceptions, and their removal, in whole or in part, the cause of every new resemblance they acquire. Wherever we can make an idea approach the impressions in force and vivacity it will likewise imitate them in its influence on the mind; and vice versa, where it imitates them in that influence, as in the present case, this must proceed from its approaching them in force and vivacity. Belief, therefore, since it causes an idea to imitate the effects of the impressions, must make it resemble them in these qualities, and is nothing but a more vivid and intense conception of any idea (T, pp. 119-120; italics mine).

Hume's answer then is that an idea becomes belief when its intensity approximates that of an impression.

The inconsistency in Hume's position now becomes apparent. Even in the present passage Hume insists that "the different degrees of force make all the original difference betwixt an impression and an idea." Consider, then, my (sufficiently and appropriately detailed) idea of the lion and my impression of the lion. The only "original difference" between them will be in their intensities. Thus, it would seem, if the intensity of my idea were augmented a sufficient

amount, the idea would become an impression. It seems that this must be the case if my idea were a belief, for, according to Hume, in order for its effects to be those of an impression its intensity must be that of an impression.

But nowhere in Hume's account of belief, which comprises a large part of Book I of the Treatise, does he say or imply that an idea which is believed becomes thereby an impression; rather, a belief "approaches an impression in force and vivacity," it is "equal" to an impression and has a "like influence on the passions," it "imitates [an impression] in its influence on the mind" - this is not the language we would expect of Hume if his view were that a belief is an impression. The implication of this is that, though a lively idea may approximate an impression in intensity, it will retain its identity as an idea rather than an impression. This is incompatible with the view that impressions and ideas "differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and vivacity" (T, p. 96).

To further cloud the issue, Hume appears to do a complete turn-about in Book II, "Of the Passions," when he discusses the operation of the human faculty he calls "sympathy," which is the ability to "receive by communication [the] inclinations and sentiments [of others]" (T, p. 316).

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known

> only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection (T, p. 317).
>
> An idea of a sentiment or passion, may ... be so inliven'd as to become the very sentiment or passion (T, p. 319).
>
> ... the ideas of the affections of others are converted into the very impressions they represent (T, p. 319).
>
> In sympathy there is an evident conversion of an idea into an impression (T, p. 370).

Hume is saying here that a sufficiently intense idea of a passion (passions are impressions), as generated by sympathy, will be the passion itself; this is not only compatible with the view that the only difference between an impression and an idea is intensity, it requires it.[1]

Hume does attempt to account for this difference in the effects of belief and sympathy. Our beliefs concern the "external" world, and the ideas which constitute such beliefs are "copies" of impressions which are forced on us by external agents - these impressions are the sensations we receive through our five "physical" senses. Our control over such impressions is very limited, and we cannot cause ourselves to have any impression of a certain sensation by starting with the idea of that sensation; we cannot cause ourselves actually to experience physical pain by an act of the imagination.

Such is not the case, according to Hume, with those impressions which are the passions, or "affections"; although any idea of a passion that we may have must be derived from or copy some prior impression of that passion, such an impression may be generated by sufficient enlivening of a prior idea: .

> 'tis no wonder an idea of a sentiment or passion, may by [sympathy] be so inliven'd as to become the very sentiment or passion. The lively idea of any object always approaches its impression . . . But this is most remarkable in the opinions and affectations; and 'tis there principally that a lively idea is converted into an impression. Our affections depend more upon ourselves, and the internal operations of the mind, than any other impressions; for which reason they arise more naturally from the imagination, and from every lively idea we form of them. This is the nature and cause of sympathy (T, p. 319).

Nevertheless, this explanation does nothing to resolve the present difficulty: in his account of belief, augmenting an idea to the intensity of an impression does not convert the idea to an impression, whereas on his account such a conversion does occur in the case of sympathy - the former account is incompatible with the intensity interpretation of the distinction between impression and idea, while the latter requires it. The failure to resolve this inconsistency is a serious shortcoming in Hume's attempt to describe the objects of human consciousness and the principles which relate them. However, this difficulty is not one with Hume's ethical theory

as such, and in what follows I will assume, with Hume, that the distinction between impressions and ideas has been clearly and consistently made.

2

Book II of the Treatise, "Of the Passions," is devoted to a classification of the impressions. The moral sentiment is an impression (T, p. 470); as such, an adequate understanding of its nature should at least enable us to place that sentiment within Hume's classification of the impressions. Hume himself never does this - the moral sentiment is never directly mentioned in all of Book II; nor in Book III, "Of Morals," where the moral sentiment theory of morals is developed, is this division of the impressions ever mentioned in connection with the moral sentiment. Therefore, if we are to attempt to place the moral sentiment we must compare what Hume says about it in Book III with what he says about the various types of impressions in Book II.

According to Hume, the moral sentiment is one of pleasure or pain: "... the distinguishing impressions, by which moral good or evil is known, are nothing but particular pains or pleasures" (T, p. 471). Hume very often equates the pleasurable moral sentiment with a certain feeling of "satisfaction," and the painful moral sentiment

with a certain feeling of "uneasiness." However, Hume maintains that there are different kinds of pleasures and pains, or feelings of satisfaction and uneasiness:

> For, first, 'tis evident, that under the term pleasure, we comprehend sensations, which are very different from each other, and which have only such a distant resemblance, as is requisite to make them be express'd by the same abstract term. A good composition of music and a bottle of good wine equally produce pleasure; and what is more, their goodness is determin'd merely by the pleasure. But shall we say upon that account, that the wine is harmonious, or the music of a good flavour? In like manner an inanimate object, and the character or sentiments of any person may, both of them, give satisfaction; but as the satisfaction is different, this keeps our sentiments concerning them from being confounded, and makes us ascribe virtue to the one, and not to the other. Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions, of that peculiar kind, which makes us praise or condemn. The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil (T, p. 472).

The pleasures and pains derived from one "physical" sense will be different in kind than those derived from another. Further, Hume maintains that there are certain distinct kinds of pleasures and pains which are not associated with the operation of the physical senses; to such pleasures and pains Hume has assigned at least three different origins: wit, beauty, and morality.

No one has ever been able to tell what wit is... 'Tis only

> by taste we can decide concerning it, nor are we possest of any other standard, upon which we can form a judgment of this kind. Now what is this taste, from which true and false wit in a manner receive their being, and without which no thought can have a title to either of these denominations? 'Tis plainly nothing but a sensation of pleasure from true wit, and of uneasiness from false, without our being able to tell the reasons of that pleasure or uneasiness. The power of bestowing these opposite sensations is, therefore, the very essence of true and false wit; and consequently the cause of that pride or humility, which arises from them (T, p. 297).
>
> ... beauty like wit, cannot be defin'd, but is discerned only by a taste or sensation ... beauty is nothing but a form, which produces pleasure, as deformity is a structure of parts, which conveys pain ... (T, p. 299).
>
> An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; Why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind. In giving a reason, therefore, for the pleasure or uneasiness, we sufficiently explain the vice or virtue. To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character ... The case is the same as in our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approbation is imply'd in the immediate pleasure they convey to us (T, p. 471).

Again, we are to understand that the pleasures and pains derived from contemplation of wit, beauty, and morals differ from each other, as well as from those derived from the physical senses. The pleasure derived from a good joke is different from that derived from a beautiful painting, and both differ from the pleasure produced by the contemplation or observation of a moral character.

There are yet other sources of pleasure and pain; Hume insists that the satisfaction or frustration (or the prospect thereof) of

certain passions and desires can also cause pleasure or pain. For instance, the satisfaction of our hunger gives us a certain pleasure; the satisfaction of our lust gives a different kind of pleasure:

> Of this kind of passion is the desire of punishment to our enemies, and of happiness to our friends; hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites. These passions, properly speaking, produce pleasure and pain, and proceed not from them, like the other affections (T, p. 439).

This helps explain Hume's view that we often experience pleasures or pains that are not moral sentiments upon contemplating certain human characters or actions. Such pleasures and pains proceed from the belief that a character or action contributes to the satisfaction of a particular desire. For example, suppose that I desire to be elected to a certain office, and I witness an acquaintance campaigning vigorously on my behalf. I will feel a certain satisfaction or pleasure upon witnessing this mode of behavior because I believe it will aid in the satisfaction of my desire to be elected. Such a feeling of pleasure will not be the moral sentiment because it originates from the prospective satisfaction of a personal desire:

> Nor is every sentiment of pleasure or pain, which arises from characters and actions, of that peculiar kind, which makes us praise or condemn. The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us; but may still command our esteem and respect. 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good

or evil (T, p. 472; second set of italics mine).

The pleasures and pains we derive from contemplation of a certain behavior's tendency to enhance or retard fulfillment of our particular desires are different in kind from those derived from a disinterested view; we cannot experience those peculiar pleasures and pains which are the moral sentiments unless we consider a character or action "in general, without reference to our particular interest" - that is, by adopting the moral point of view. I will later return to a more detailed examination of this condition for the experiencing of the moral sentiment.

3

Where, then, are the peculiar pleasures and pains that are the moral sentiments to be placed in Hume's classification of the impressions? To attempt an answer requires that we examine this classification in some detail. Hume divides the impressions into two main classes: those that are "original" and those that are "secondary." Hume also calls the former "impressions of sensation" and the latter "impressions of reflection" or "passions" (also "sentiments," "emotions," and "affections"). The impressions of sensation "are such as without any antecedent perceptions arise in the soul, from the constitution of the body, from the animal spirits, or from the

application of objects to the external organs" (T, p. 275). These include the sensory sensations and "all bodily pains and pleasures." Such "bodily" pains and pleasures are those that are derived from the physical senses.

It should be clear that these pleasures and pains are not the moral sentiments; unlike the latter, the former perceptions arise spontaneously inasmuch as they are not connected in any way to any antecedent perceptions (i.e., impressions or ideas). Though the idea of a razor cutting my flesh can generate in me the idea of "tactile" pain, it can never generate in me the impression of that pain, nor can my visual impression of a razor fast approaching. It is the actual application of the razor to my flesh that will cause in me, via "unknown" (T, p. 7) "natural and physical" (T, p. 275) processes, the impression of pain. In contrast, the moral sentiment is always caused by antecedent impressions or ideas of a character or action:

> ... from a primary constitution of nature certain characters and passions, by the very view and contemplation, produce a pain, and others in like manner excite a pleasure (T, p. 296).
>
> An action, or sentiment, or character is virtuous or vicious; why? because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind ... To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character (T, p. 471).
>
> The pain or pleasure, which arises from the general survey

> or view of any action or quality of the mind, constitutes its vice and virtue (T, p. 614).

Thus, the moral sentiment, being caused by an antecedent impression or idea, cannot be classified as an original impression.

The secondary impressions, unlike the original impressions, are prompted by antecedent perceptions; so it would seem that the moral sentiment should fall within this category. Hume further divides the secondary or reflective impressions into the "direct" and the "indirect." The direct passions are "such as arise immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure" (T, p. 276); these passions may be induced by pain or pleasure that is actual, or merely by the prospect (i. e. idea) of pain or pleasure. The type of direct passion that will be produced depends on whether the pain or pleasure is actual or potential, and, if potential, on the probability which we associate with its occurrence. Under the direct passions Hume lists "desire, aversion, grief, joy, fear, despair and security" (T, p. 277).

The mechanism of the indirect passions is more complex; "under the indirect passions I comprehend pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice, generosity, with their dependents" (T, p. 277). By "dependents" Hume means passions which are a composition of two or more of the indirect passions;

for instance, love mixed with humility is the passion of esteem, and hate mixed with pride is contempt. In describing the operation of the indirect passions Hume concentrates on four of them: pride, humility, love, and hate.

An indirect passion must have an object, that to which the passion is directed; for Hume, this is the object whose idea is "excited" in us when we experience the passion. In the case of love or hate, the object is always another "person or thinking being," while with pride and humility the object is always self; our affections for inanimate objects and animals are not, according to Hume, instances of love. This restriction on the possible objects of these indirect passions is inexplicable; Hume attributes it to "an original quality or primary impulse" (T, p. 280, p. 329), inseparable from the human constitution.

An indirect passion also has a cause, which is distinct from the object. The cause of my love, or pride, is some quality which provides me with pleasure, and the cause of my hate, or humility, is some quality which provides me with pain; moreover, the cause of an indirect passion must be associated in idea with the object of the passion. We commonly refer to the cause of our love (or hate) as the reason why we love (or hate) someone. Such reasons may be extremely varied, but, Hume argues, they always involve something associated with the person which gives us pleasure or pain. For

instance, my mistress may provide me with sensual pleasures. I come to associate such pleasures with her, and she becomes the object of my love. Or, my neighbor might own a dog which frequently bites me. I soon come to associate the unpleasantness of these events with my neighbor, and I may come to hate him for it. Similarly, the pleasures and pains that invoke pride or humility must have a cause that is closely related to self. These most often will be one's own character traits or possessions.

The association of the cause of an indirect passion with that passion's object must be a strong one if it is to produce the sentiment at all. If my mistress is very sparing or unpredictable with her charms, my association of her with sensual pleasure may be too weak to produce the passion of love. Or, if my neighbor knows nothing about his dog's ill manners, this might weaken my association of him and his dog's painful attacks enough to prevent the production of hate in me. Because the association between object and cause must be so strong, Hume believes that we never come to love or hate someone on the basis of single actions alone; these passions are aroused only if we believe that the person's actions arise because of a certain quality of mind or character which is a relatively permanent aspect of that person. Only then will the association between the pleasures or pains which his actions have caused us and our idea of

the person himself become strong enough to allow the production of love or hate.

Thus, part of Hume's explanation of the mechanism of the indirect passions involves an association of ideas, between that of certain pleasures or pains and that of the object; but Hume also relies on what he calls an "association of impressions." Different passions have different sensations, but these sensations share varying degrees of resemblance. According to Hume, when we experience one passion we have a tendency to consequently experience other passions which resemble it:

> All resembling impressions are connected together, and no sooner one arises than the rest immediately follow. Grief and disappointment give rise to anger, anger to envy, envy to malice, and malice to grief again, till the whole circle be compleated (T, p. 283).

Thus, when we experience pleasure, we tend to experience pleasant passions. When our pleasure results from something which we closely associate in idea with a certain person or our self, we tend to experience the pleasant sentiment of love or pride, with that person or self as its object; a parallel mechanism underlies the production of the unpleasant sentiments of hate and humility. Hume is quite fond of referring to this mechanism of the indirect passions as "a double relation between impressions and ideas."

What is at once both evident and disturbing is the absence from Hume's lists of the direct and indirect passions of any kind of pleasure or pain. Granted, we have no reason to assume that Hume considers these lists to be complete. But it is extremely doubtful that a man who claims that "the chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain" (T, p. 574) would neglect to include species of pleasure or pain in such lengthy lists of the direct and indirect passions - unless he does not believe that they belong there.

In truth, Hume cannot include pleasures or pains in the direct or indirect passions because pleasure and pain are, according to him, the efficient causes of the direct and indirect passions: " 'Tis easy to observe, that the passions, both direct and indirect, are founded on pain and pleasure, and that in order to produce an affection of any kind, 'tis only requisite to present some good or evil [i. e. some pleasure or pain] " (T, p. 438). Such pleasures or pains may be physical (i. e., impressions of sensation), they may be those that are derived from wit, beauty, or morals, or they may be produced by the actual or prospective satisfaction or frustration of passions or desires. For example, in the section "Of the direct passions" Hume tells us that "a suit of fine clothes produces pleasure from their beauty; and this pleasure produces the direct passions, or the

impressions of volition and desire" (T, p. 439). The pleasure is not itself a direct passion, but rather is a part of the hidden mental process which concludes with the experiencing of such a passion.

Again, in Hume's detailed discussion of the indirect passions, he endeavors to show that these passions always involve in their efficient cause "a pleasure or uneasiness separate from the passion" (T, p. 295), "a pain or pleasure independent of the passion" (T, pp. 298-299). These pains and pleasures are not themselves indirect passions; rather, they are crucial elements in Hume's explanation of the origin of the indirect passions.

Norman Kemp Smith, in his critical study The Philosophy of David Hume, recognizes the difficulties encountered in attempting to place the non-bodily pleasures and pains in Hume's classification of the impressions. He also rightly points out that it is "more by implication than by express statement" that Hume distinguishes between "bodily pains and pleasures and the pleasures and pains that arise from objects immediately upon their mere contemplation."[2] Nevertheless, Smith does not believe that this difficulty in classification extends to the moral sentiments because he does not hold that the moral sentiments are pains or pleasures at all, though, as are all passions, it is "pleasure and pain upon which they are 'founded'."[3]

In Smith's view, both the moral and the aesthetic sentiments

> can be identified as being the passions which we experience on the mere contemplation of beauty and deformity in action and external forms, and may accordingly be further described as being modes of approval and disapproval. They constitute our delight in the beautiful, our revulsion from the ugly or disordered, our sentiments of praise and blame in the presence of virtue and vice. As thus immediately arising upon an act of contemplation, they have to be classed with the direct, not with the indirect passions. [4]

In my next chapter I will show that the moral sentiment does indeed share some important characteristics of the direct passions. However, Hume is insistent throughout the Treatise on equating the moral sentiment with a "peculiar" kind of pleasure or pain. As such, there is no consistent way to classify the moral sentiment as a passion, either direct or indirect.

I have argued that Hume's exclusion of pleasures and pains from his lists, in Book II, of the direct and indirect passions is a strong indication that he does not believe that they belong there. However, there is a single passage at the beginning of Book II in which Hume seems to be saying that the moral sentiment is an impression of reflection:

> The reflective impressions may be divided into two kinds, viz. the calm and the violent. Of the first kind is the sense of beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects. Of the second are the passions of love and hatred, grief and joy, pride and humility. This division is far from being exact. The raptures of poetry and music frequently rise to the greatest height; while those other impressions, properly called passions, may decay into so soft an emotion,

as to become, in a manner, imperceptible (T, p. 276).

This passage does nothing to ease the problem of the classification of the moral sentiment. Hume points out a few lines later that the calm-violent distinction is "vulgar and specious." The legitimate concern is with the direct-indirect distinction. There is still no consistent way to classify the moral sentiment, be it calm or otherwise, as direct or indirect, and thus no consistent way to classify it as an impression of reflection, or passion.

There remains at this point to offer a conjecture as to why Hume is so unclear as to the status of the moral sentiment. In this, I once again find myself at odds with Kemp Smith. Smith contends that "Hume thought out the teaching of the Treatise in the reverse order from that in which he expounds it; when he started, it was his ethics in which he was primarily interested."[5] If Smith is right in this, if indeed the development of the ethical theory which Hume offers in Book III predates and motivates the development of the theories of the understanding and the passions, Hume's total failure in placing the moral sentiment in his scheme of impressions becomes all the more astounding. Further, in conjunction with this, is it at all plausible that if Smith is correct in identifying the moral sentiment as a direct passion that Hume would declare, in Book II, that but for two minor, and for the present point, irrelevant,

exceptions "none of the direct affections seem to merit our particular attention" (T, p. 439)? I think not.

With this in mind, I am inclined to take Hume's pronouncements in his introduction to the Treatise at face value. There he tells us that it is his intention to develop "a science of man," to "explain the principles of human nature." Such a science, he believes, is necessary for the development of every other science, even such as "mathematics, natural philosophy, and natural religion." In treating of the understanding and the passions in Books I and II, respectively, Hume attempts to develop this science of man; and Book III, "Of Morals," can be considered to be an illustration of how these basic principles of human nature can be used to develop sciences which deal with more specific human phenomena - in this case that of "morals."

> I am not, however, without hopes, that the present system of philosophy [i. e., Hume's science of man] will acquire new force as it advances; and that our reasonings concerning morals will corroborate whatever has been said concerning the understanding and the passions (T, p. 455).

This way of proceeding would be analogous to a scientist concluding a text on the physics of wave motion with a section on the phenomenon of sound - the basic physical principles developed in the first part of the text would be applied in the second section to a specific kind

of wave motion, sound.

It is likely then that, in writing Books I and II, Hume does not have in mind any particular application of his basic principles, such as the science of morals, to the exclusion of others. This provides some explanation of why Hume has neglected to be more specific, and exhibits some confusion, about the moral sentiment in Book II. It does not, of course, explain why Hume is not more specific in Book III where is concerned with morality, and the moral sentiment. Perhaps here Hume has come to believe that the status of the moral sentiment as a passion is too obvious to consider in detail. Of course, it is not. In omitting a consideration of this question from Book III, either by design or not, Hume overlooks the very serious conflicts which arise from holding both that the moral sentiment is a species of pain or pleasure and that it is a legitimate passion.

REFERENCES

[1]In connection with this, I find here a further indication, cryptic though it is, that I have not been mistaken in interpreting Hume as implying in Book I, "Of the Understanding," that an idea, as intensified by belief, cannot be converted into an impression. Following his discussion of how sympathy intensifies our ideas, Hume says:

> Let us compare all these circumstances, and we shall find, that sympathy is exactly correspondent to the operations of our understanding, and even contains something more surprising and extra-ordinary (T, p. 320).

The operation of the understanding to which Hume refers is that process by which an idea is converted (intensified) to belief; what is surprising and extraordinary about sympathy is that it not only intensifies ideas, but, unlike the operations of the understanding, actually converts them into impressions.

[2]Smith, p. 162.

[3]Ibid., p. 163.

[4]Ibid., p. 167.

[5]Ibid., p. 538.

CHAPTER III

THE ORIGIN OF THE MORAL SENTIMENT

1

Hume's moral sentiment, then, is a "peculiar" kind of pleasure or pain. The question I wish to examine now is whether or not this moral sentiment derives from a "moral sense." As I mentioned in my Introduction, the conventional wisdom concurs in treating Hume as a moral sense theorist. One difficulty in appraising such an interpretation, however, is the vagueness of the term "moral sense." Most often, the moral sense is described as an "internal" counterpart to our physical senses; yet, such a description by analogy suffers all the more from the difficulties in saying just what a physical sense is.

A classic, and perhaps the first, formulation of a moral sense theory is found in the works of Frances Hutcheson (1694-1746).[1] Hutcheson describes the moral sense as follows:

> That as the Author of Nature has determin'd us to receive, by our external senses, pleasant or disagreeable Ideas of Objects, according as they are useful or hurtful to our Bodys; and to receive from uniform Objects the Pleasures of Beauty and Harmony . . . in the same manner he has given us a MORAL SENSE, to direct our Actions, and to give us still nobler Pleasures . . . We mean by [the moral sense] only a Determination of our Minds to receive amiable or disagreeable Ideas of Actions, when they occur to our Observation, antecedent to any Opinions of Advantage or Loss to redound to our selves from them . . .[2]

Hutcheson insists that these pleasures or pains which are the moral sentiments are different in kind from those derived from our physical senses, or from views of our own interests and desires. We must then be said to have the "power" of receiving such pleasures and pains, and this "Power of receiving these Perceptions may be call'd a MORAL SENSE."[3]

> That the Perceptions of moral Good and Evil, are perfectly different from those of natural Good, or Advantage every one must convince himself, by reflecting on the different Manner in which he finds himself affected when these objects occur to him.[4]

> ... some Actions have to Men an immediate Goodness; or, that by a superior Sense, which I call a Moral one, we perceive Pleasure in the Contemplation of such Actions in others, and are determin'd to love the Agent, (and much more do we perceive Pleasure in being conscious of having done such Actions ourselves) without any View of further natural Advantage from them.[5]

Hutcheson maintains that empirical investigation reveals that, in fact, all actions whose contemplations invoke the pleasant sentiment of approval have a common quality: they spring from a feeling of benevolence, or love of others. This, however, is a contingent matter. Though Hutcheson argues that the actual constitution of our moral sense is most in keeping with our idea of the nature of our creator, God, it could logically be otherwise:

> If it be here enquir'd 'Could not the DEITY have given us a

> different or contrary determination of Mind, viz. to approve Actions upon another Foundation than Benevolence?' It is certain, there is nothing in this surpassing the natural Power of the DEITY.[6]

Hutcheson recognizes at least five different types of senses (i.e., modes of "determinations of our minds to receive amiable or disagreeable ideas") in human beings: external senses (which I have called the "physical" senses), the sense of beauty and harmony in objects, a public or a social sympathy, the moral sense, and a sense of honor. Each of these senses is primary in that none can be reduced to a combination of the others; the pleasures and pains produced by each are unique. In particular, Hutcheson is careful to point out that the moral sense is not a manifestation of the sense of sympathy, for, he argues, merely to share the feelings of others through sympathy is not to "reflect upon Virtue or Vice."[7]

According to Hutcheson, the underlying mechanism of the moral sense, no less than those of the other senses, must remain a mystery. The causes are hidden, but the effects are clear:

> This natural Determination to approve and admire, or hate and dislike Actions, is no doubt an occult Quality. But is it any more mysterious that the Idea of an Action should raise Esteem, or Contempt, than that the motion, or tearing of Flesh should give Pleasure, or Pain; or the Act of Volition should move Flesh and Bones? In the latter case, we have got the Brain, and elastic Fibres, and animal Spirits, and elastic Fluids, like the Indian's Elephant, and Tortoise, to bear the Burden of the Difficulty: but go one step further,

> and you find the whole as difficult as at first, and equally a Mystery with this Determination to love and approve, or hate and despise Actions and Agents, without any Views of interest, as they appear benevolent, or the contrary.[8]

C. D. Broad, in his important article entitled "Some Reflections on Moral - Sense Theories in Ethics,"[9] provides a taxonomy for moral sense theories. He shows that there are two possible interpretations of the epistemological status of the moral sense. The first is what he calls the "Naively Realistic Account" of the moral sense; such an account of the moral sense is analogous to a naively realistic account of ordinary sense perception. Roughly, such an account holds that there are objective sensible qualities present in external objects, independent of any perceiver, which can be perceived just as they are through the appropriate physical sense. On a naively realistic account of the moral sense, there exist as objective properties of characters and actions certain ethical characteristics, such as rightness, which can be apprehended directly by the moral sense.

The alternative account of the moral sense Broad terms the "Dispositional Account." Here again there is an analogy with a certain account of sense perception. The dispositional account of sense perception denies that sensible qualities exist objectively in external objects. Rather, to say that a thing has quality x is to

say something like "that thing will present an x-ish appearance to normal perceivers under standard conditions." On a dispositional account of the moral sense, that sense is a faculty which provides us with unique emotions or sensations when we contemplate characters and actions.

It is exceedingly difficult to stamp Hutcheson's moral sense theory as either naively realistic or dispositional. Perhaps the most incisive examination of this question is William K. Frankena's article "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory"[10]; Frankena is led to conclude there that "Hutcheson's general epistemological position [is one which he] never quite explicitly formulates." Frankena is supported in his conclusion by Henning Jensen, who finds strains of both types of accounts in Hutcheson:

> The naively realistic side of his theory, according to which the moral sense would cognize some empirical characteristic, remains undeveloped. Worse still, a naively realistic terminology in his moral sense doctrine conflicts with the fact that a naively realistic theory is entirely foreign to his general epistemological position.[11]

2

What kind of moral sense theory Hutcheson holds is not clear; but there can be no doubt that he is a moral sense theorist. This certainty is not provided merely by Hutcheson's usage of the

term "moral sense," for to employ certain terminology is not in itself to advocate a moral sense theory. Rather, the criterion of a moral sense theory is summarized by Broad as follows:

> [It would hold] that there is a peculiar kind of experience which human beings are liable to have when they contemplate certain acts, and that this can take either of two opposite forms, viz., a pro-form and an anti-form. [It] would hold that this experience is of the nature of feeling, where "feeling" is used to include both sensation and emotion as distinguished from thought.[12]

Hutcheson is insistent on pointing out that our moral feelings are "still nobler" and "perfectly different" from all others, a difference of which we are immediately conscious[13]; it is this which marks him as a moral sense theorist.

The issue I wish to turn to now is whether or not Hume holds a moral sense theory in the Treatise. There is little doubt that Hume has borrowed much from Hutcheson; the question is: how much? Those that interpret Hume as proposing a moral sense theory in the Treatise often regard Hume as doing nothing more than improving on Hutcheson's exposition. For example, Kemp Smith maintains that "Book III of the Treatise is a masterly restatement, with a clarity and self-consistency beyond anything possible to Hutcheson, of Hutcheson's own main theses . . . ."[14] One of these main theses is that man is fitted with a specifically moral sense,

which affords him a "peculiar" and unique kind of pleasure and pain.

Hutcheson is content to regard the operations of this sense as "occult" in that, as with our physical senses, its "explanation" must be limited to a description of initial conditions and effects. Hume shares this same view with respect to human senses and mental qualities:

> For to me it seems evident, that the essence of mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situations (T, p. xvii).

If Hume indeed believes that there is a moral sense, we would expect that Book III of the Treatise could offer little more than a detailed account of this sense's "particular effects which result from its different circumstances and situations." This, as we shall see, is not the case.

It cannot be denied that Hume's terminology in Book III of the Treatise is often that of a moral sense theory. He has even entitled Section II of Book III "Moral distinctions deriv'd from a moral sense." Moreover, it seems that Hume, unlike Hutcheson, can clearly be marked as advocating a dispositional account of the moral sense: "Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat, and cold which, according to modern philos-

ophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind" (T, p. 469).

Yet, I believe that in this case we should be careful in taking Hume at his word. Rather than relying on what he says, we should look at what he does; and what he does, I maintain, does not fit comfortably at all with the claim that he is advocating a moral sense theory. A sense, for Hume, is a "primary" and "original" faculty; though we may, through experimentation, describe the operations of a sense in terms of general principles, for instance, that we always perceive as such-and-such color a light of such-and-such wavelength, we cannot resolve a sense into more basic principles of human nature, for this would be to deny its status as a distinct faculty. A sense is as it is, and we cannot hope to explain it. With this in mind, I wish to draw attention to the following passages taken from the section "Moral distinctions deriv'd from a moral sense":

> It may now be ask'd in general, concerning this pain or pleasure, that distinguishes moral good and evil, From what principles is it derived, and whence does it arise in the human mind? To this I reply, first, that 'tis absurd to imagine, that in every particular instance, these sentiments are produc'd by an original quality and primary constitution ... Such a method of proceeding is not conformable to the usual maxims, by which nature is conducted, where a few principles produce all that variety we observe in the universe, and every thing is carry'd on in the easiest and most simple manner. "Tis necessary, therefore, to abridge these

> primary impulses, and find some more general principles, upon which all our notions of morals are founded (T, p. 473).
>
> Thus we are still brought back to our first position, that virtue is distinguished by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation. This decision is very commodious; because it reduces us to this simple question, Why any action or sentiment upon the general view or survey, gives a certain satisfaction or uneasiness, in order to shew the origin of its moral rectitude or depravity ... (T, pp. 475-476).

It is reasonable to ask for a description of the way a certain sense operates under certain conditions; for instance, we might ask what we would perceive, through our sense of sight, when exposed to light of a given wavelength. Similarly, if we assume that we possess a moral sense, it is legitimate to ask what feelings would be produced, through this sense, when we consider a certain act of unprovoked violence. But we cannot reasonably ask why a certain sense works the way it does - it is not even clear what an answer to this question would have to be like. We do not ask why we perceive a certain wavelength as a certain color; we do not expect a moral sense theorist to ask why certain actions and characters provoke the moral sentiments that they do. Yet, Hume poses just such a question: "Why [does] any action or sentiment upon the general view or survey, give a certain satisfaction or uneasiness ... ?".

I will show in the following sections that Hume answers his

own question by resolving the moral sense into "some more general principles" of human nature; he cannot be said to countenance a moral sense at all in the Treatise. My argument for this will rely on Broad's criterion for a moral sense theory, to the effect that such a theory must hold that the moral sentiment is a feeling unlike all others. I will show that exactly the same kind of pleasures and pains which are for Hume, under the proper conditions, the moral sentiments are, under other conditions, non-moral sentiments; that is, there is no uniquely moral sentiment at all.

3

In describing the operation of a sense, we are sometimes able to enumerate certain conditions which must obtain in order for the sense to function. For instance, illumination is required for the operation of our sense of sight. Hume tells us that " 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil" (T, p. 472). Those who see Hume as a moral sense theorist must view this statement as the claim that, as a matter of act, the moral sense does not operate unless one has first adopted the moral point of view.

Unfortunately, Hume is notoriously vague in describing the moral point of view, which he also commonly refers to as a "general

view or survey." At least, we know that the moral point of view involves an "overlooking" of personal interests and desires (T, p, 582). The pains and pleasures which derive from the satisfaction or frustration of our personal desires, or the prospects thereof, are not the moral sentiments. If I contemplate an action or character in its relation to myself, according to its tendency to promote or retard my personal welfare, the pleasures or pains which follow will be "interested" sentiments. The moral sentiment, on the other hand, arises only upon considering an action or character in relation to society as a whole, in which each member's interests count equally with every other's. This is commonly called "taking an objective viewpoint."

There is an important point to be made here. It is obvious that there is a difference between one's adopting the moral point of view and one's believing that one has; the latter need not imply the former. We see examples every day of people who have become so habituated to a certain interested point of view that they cannot consider matters objectively, though they make an honest effort to do so. Yet, many such people do believe that they have adopted the moral point of view. Consider, for instance, the majority of lawyers who argue sincerely against no-fault insurance, or the majority of doctors who argue sincerely against socialized medicine. I

think it is safe to assume that many of these people are being influenced by personal interest, though they themselves may not realize this. Hume shows himself to be well aware of this possibility:

> Our predominant motive or intention is, indeed, frequently concealed from ourselves when it is mingled and confounded with other motives which the mind, from vanity or self-conceit, it desirous of supposing more prevalent (I, p. 117).

It is important to understand that, for Hume, we must be successful in adopting the moral point of view if we are to experience the moral sentiment. If we believe that we have adopted the moral point of view in a certain consideration when we in fact have not, the pleasures and pains which may be aroused in us will be interested sentiments, not the moral, though " 'Tis true, these sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another" (T, p. 472).

If Hume's were a moral sense theory, there could be no further explanation of why successful adoption of the moral point of view is a prerequisite for the operation of the moral sense; it could be explained in no other way than to attribute it to a "primary constitution" or "original quality" of human nature. Yet Hume does not follow this course. We will see that Hume's statement that " 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without

reference to our personal interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil" is not a description of the operation of a moral sense; it is rather a definition (albeit incomplete) of the moral sentiment.

4

Emulating the scientist in his search for general principles, Hume undertakes an empirical investigation of sorts; he endeavors to compile a list of the characters or actions which tend to produce the moral sentiment in objective observers. From his compilation, Hume finds that all "qualities of the mind" which tend to cause the pleasurable moral sentiment can be classified as one or more of the following[15]: those that are immediately "agreeable" to the possessor, those that are immediately agreeable to those who come into contact with the possessor, those that tend to be "useful" to the possessor, and those that tend to be useful to others.

By qualities of the mind that are "immediately agreeable" to the possessor Hume means those whose immediate sensation is pleasant. As examples, Hume offers the following: cheerfulness, courage, tranquillity, delicacy of taste (I, pp. 74-83). There are other qualities which, Hume tells us, bestow "an immediate enjoyment" or pleasure to others, "communicating, on [their] first

appearance, a lively joy and satisfaction to everyone who has any comprehension of [them] " (I, p. 84); as examples of these Hume lists good manners, wit, ingenuity, eloquence, modesty, decency, cleanliness, and grace. The idea of any quality which falls under either of these two categories tends to produce a pleasant sentiment in us if we adopt the moral point of view.

By "useful" Hume means contributing to happiness and welfare. Some qualities of mind tend to be useful to their possessor, such as pride, perseverance, patience, vigilance, and frugality. The ideas of these qualities too produce the pleasant moral sentiment in an objective observer. Some qualities tend to be useful in promoting the welfare of society at large, such as benevolence, honesty, and fidelity. It is with respect to this category that Hume introduces a distinction between what he calls "natural" and "artificial" virtues. A natural virtue is a quality of mind which is one of the following: it is immediately agreeable to the possessor, it is immediately agreeable to others, it tends to prompt actions which are useful to the possessor or others, independently of the actions of others. Some actions, however, are useful to society only within the context of an accepted system of conventional behavior. This system finds expression in our laws of property which, Hume believes, define the limits of justice and injustice.

> The only difference betwixt the natural virtues and justice lies in this, that the good, which results from the former, arises from every single act, and is the object of some natural passion: Whereas a single act of justice, consider'd in itself, may often be contrary to the public good; and 'tis only the concurrence of mankind, in a general scheme or system of action, which is advantageous ... and 'twas with a view to this advantage, that men, by their voluntary conventions, establish'd it (T, p. 579).

Hume believes that initially there is no human propensity toward acts of justice as such; there is only a view to self-interest. However, men come to see that certain mutually accepted conventions are essential to the furtherance of this self-interest. Once this system is established, there can be developed in us a certain quality of mind or inclination to perform acts of justice for their own sake. As with the former three types of mental qualities, we experience a pleasant sentiment if we contemplate, from the moral point of view, a quality of mind which tends to prompt actions which promote the welfare of society, either "naturally" or "artificially" (as a contributor to the system of justice).

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Cheerfulness, in addition to being pleasant to the possessor, conveys an immediate satisfaction to others in contact with the possessor; and benevolence, according to Hume, is pleasant to the possessor as well as being useful to others.

The question Hume poses is this: by what principles do

such types of mental qualities cause in us a pleasant sentiment when contemplated from the moral point of view? Hume's solution is prompted by a more careful consideration of those qualities of mind which are useful, either to the possessor or to others. Hume sets the stage as follows. We experience pleasant sentiments when we observe or contemplate actions which we believe will promote our own welfare. This is accounted for by self-interest. But there are cases where we ignore our own interests and desires, by adopting the moral point of view, and still receive a pleasure from observing or contemplating actions or characters which tend to be useful to others. How can this be? Hume's answer is the principle of sympathy, the "true origin of morals" (T, p. 575).

> Now as the means to an end can only be agreeable, where the end is agreeable; and as the good of society, where our own interest is not concern'd, or that of our friends, please only by sympathy: It follows, that sympathy is the source of the esteem, which we pay to all the artificial virtues ... Thus it appears, that sympathy is a very powerful principle in human nature ... and that it produces our sentiment of morals in all the artificial virtues. From thence we may presume that it also gives rise to many of the other virtues; and that qualities acquire our approbation, because of their tendency to the good of mankind (T, pp. 577-578).

Hume then considers those qualities of mind which are immediately agreeable to the possessor or to others; he finds that here too sympathy is essential to an explanation of how a pleasant

sentiment can be aroused from a non-interested consideration of these qualities. In each case, the pleasure we receive from a non-interested view of the pleasure of others can only be explained by an appeal to sympathy:

> The person is a stranger: I am in no way interested in him, nor lie under any obligation to him: His happiness concerns not me, farther than the happiness of every human, and indeed of every sensible creature: That is, it affects me only by sympathy. From that principle, whenever I discover his happiness and good, whether in its causes or effects, I enter so deeply into it, that it gives me a sensible emotion (T, pp. 588-589).

Hume takes few pains to conceal his feeling of self-satisfaction with his appeal to sympathy to account for the pleasant sentiments associated with those qualities of mind commonly called "virtues":

> 'Tis very happy, in our philosophical researches, when we find the same phaenomenon diversified by a variety of circumstances; and by discovering what is common among them, can the better assure ourselves of the truth of any hypothesis we may make use of to explain it. Were nothing esteem'd virtue but what were beneficial to society, I am persuaded, that the foregoing explication of the moral sense [viz., in terms of sympathy] ought still to be receiv'd, and that upon sufficient evidence: But this evidence must grow upon us, when we find other kinds of virtue, which will not admit of any explication except from that hypothesis (T, p. 588).

Unfortunately, Hume's good feelings might have diminished considerably had he realized the seriousness of the ambiguity with

which he would burden future readers. The difficulty lies in determining the nature of the relationship between a sympathetic sentiment and a moral sentiment. Hume, it is true, does clearly tell us that sympathy "produces our sentiment of morals" (T, p. 577), that "sympathy is the chief source of moral distinctions" (T, p. 618), that "To that principle [viz. sympathy], therefore, we are to ascribe the sentiment of approbation, which arises from the survey of all those virtues, that are useful to society, or to the person possess'd of them" (T, p. 619). The crucial question is: is the sentiment derived from sympathy merely a cause of the moral sentiment, or is it identical to the moral sentiment? In attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to examine the nature of Humean sympathy in detail.

5

Concerning sympathy, which is the human ability to "receive by communication another's inclinations and sentiments," Hume believes that "No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself, and in its consequences" (T, p. 316).

> To this principle we ought to ascribe the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation . . . A good-natur'd man finds himself in an instant of the same humour with his company; and even

> the proudest and most surly take a tincture from their countrymen and acquaintance. A chearful countenance infuses a sensible complacency and serenity into my mind; as an angry or sorrowful one throws a sudden damp upon me. Hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper and disposition (T, pp. 316-317).

But Hume is not content to pass off our ability to sympathize as an "occult" quality; rather, he insists that sympathy "must be trac'd up to its first principles" (T, p. 317).

The first principles to which Hume is led involve the relationship between ideas and impressions, and the possibility of the conversion of the former to the latter. No one of us can experience directly the impression of another's passion. What we can observe is "external signs in the countenance and conversation" (T, p. 317). We know from our own personal experience that we tend to exhibit a certain set of external signs when we are experiencing a certain passion. Thus, according to Hume, we come to associate the ideas of certain passions with certain signs. When we observe certain signs in another, we come to have, via the process of association (which "operates in so silent and imperceptible a manner, that we are scarce sensible of it" (T, p. 305)), the idea of the appropriate passion. At this point, however, we still conceive of the passion as belonging to the other person (T, p. 319),

and hence the vivacity of our idea of this passion will be a function of the vivacity of our idea of that person.

It is a corollary to Hume's principle of association that an impression will "infuse" a like degree of vivacity or intensity on a closely related idea. Hume claims, in his discussion of sympathy, that

> 'Tis evident, that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that 'tis not possible to imagine, that anything can in this particular go beyond it. Whatever object, therefore, is related to ourselves must be conceived with a like vivacity of conception ... (T, p. 317).

Because the impression of one's self is so vivid, the ideas of objects which are associated with ourselves will be more or less intense, depending on the strength of the association. Two important factors in determining the strength of such an association are resemblance and contiguity; that is, we tend to "identify" more with objects that resemble us, and which are near to us in space or time. We tend to more closely associate the idea of ourselves with the idea of an animal than with the idea of an inanimate object; within the animal kingdom itself we tend to form closer or more distant associations, depending on the degree of resemblance born to us. Even in the case of human beings, the force with which we associate the idea of another person with the idea of ourselves is

increased where that person resembles us in "manners, or character, or language" (T, p. 318), and where that person is near to us in distance or time:

> The stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person (T, p. 318).

When we sympathize with another person, then, we first receive the idea of that person exhibiting certain signs (either from direct observation, or from some other indirect information). We are carried thence to an idea of a passion as affecting that person. This idea will be more or less intense, depending on the degree of association which binds that person to ourselves. If this association is of sufficient degree, the intensity with which we conceive of ourselves will be transmitted to our idea of the other person, and to our idea of his passion, and in so doing "This [latter] idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection" (T, p. 317). "This is the nature and cause of sympathy" (T, p. 319).

Based on this description of sympathy as "nothing but a lively idea converted into an impression" (T, pp. 385-386), Hume

explains how we can sympathize with passions which are non-existent. For example, if I should come upon a person in tears, I am immediately carried to a lively idea of the sorrow which I imagine to be affecting that person, and which may be "inliven'd" to such a degree as to become the very sorrow itself. This mechanism would be unaffected if, unbeknownst to me, I were witnessing tears of joy rather than of sorrow.

Similarly, I am able to sympathize with passions that I conceive to affect a person at a later time:

> For supposing I saw a person perfectly unknown to me, who, while asleep in the fields, was in danger of being trod under foot by horses, I shou'd immediately run to his assistance; and in this I shou'd be actuated by the same principle of sympathy, which makes me concern'd for the present sorrows of a stranger ... Sympathy being nothing but a lively idea converted into an impression, 'tis evident, that, in considering the future possible or probable condition of any person, we may enter into it with so vivid a conception as to make it our own concern; and by that means be sensible of pains and pleasures, which neither belong to ourselves, nor at the present instant have any real existence (T, pp. 385-386).

Although my concern here is not with an appraisal of Hume's principle of sympathy as such, it would be inappropriate to pass over its examination without at least pointing out some of its severe difficulties. As we have seen, Hume's account of sympathy, which appears in Book II of the Treatise, relies on his contention that "the

idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that 'tis not possible to imagine, that any thing in this particular can go beyond it." But in this Hume flatly contradicts that for which he so carefully argues in Book I, in his section "Of personal identity."

> There are some philosophers [amusingly enough, the Hume of Book II is one of them], who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity ... Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of self, after the manner it is here explain'd (T, p. 251).
>
> I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity ... There is properly no simplicity in the mind at one time, nor identity in different ... They are the successive perceptions only, that constitutes the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd" (T, pp. 252-253).

Kemp Smith argues that there is some evidence that Hume is aware of this inconsistency.[16] Smith points to Hume's use, in his account of sympathy, of the phrase "our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person," which Smith finds to be "cumbersome" and "non-committal" when compared with the more

definite phrase "the idea, or rather impression of ourselves" (T, p. 317). Says Smith, "It is natural to suppose that his later uneasy awareness of the contradiction between the two Books has necessitated these alternative wordings." In any case, Hume's awareness has not, in the Treatise, prompted him to resolve the difficulty, (see T, pp. 635-636) and his account of sympathy suffers because of it.

I have alluded to the second difficulty in my second chapter: the distinction between impressions and ideas. I pointed out that Hume's several pronouncements that the only "original difference" between impressions and ideas is degree of vivacity is belied by his account of belief, wherein an idea, though augmented in intensity to a level of an impression, retains its identity as an idea. In sympathy, however, the conversion from idea to impression does take place. Hume admits that this difference in the capacities of belief and sympathy is "surprising and extraordinary" (T, p. 320), but he offers nothing in his account of sympathy which helps to explain this difference.

Finally, it is interesting to note the sequence of explanations which can be traced in the Treatise. Hume attempts to account for our moral sentiments by appealing to a principle more basic: sympathy. Again, Hume insists on tracing sympathy to its "first

principles." This leads him to the principle of association, which is developed in Book I. At first, Hume pretends to be content to seek no further for principles more basic than that of association:

> Here is a kind of ATTRACTION, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to shew itself in as many and as various forms. Its effects are everywhere conspicuous; but as to its causes, they are mostly unknown, and must be resolv'd into original qualities of human nature, which I pretend not to explain. Nothing is more requisite for a true philosopher, than to restrain the intemperate desire of searching into causes ... into obscure and uncertain speculations (T, pp. 12-13).

Sadly enough, Hume's self-restraint is not complete. Only a few sections later, he can't help admitting that " 'Twou'd have been easy to have made an imaginary dissection of the brain, and have shewn, why upon our conception of any idea, the animal spirits run into all the contiguous traces, and rouze up the other ideas, that are related to it" (T, p. 60). Sadder yet, Hume then proceeds to give just such an anatomy lesson in explaining how certain errors in reasoning occur.

6

What, then, is the relationship between the moral sentiment and sympathy? Hume tells us he is seeking to resolve the moral sense into "some more general principles" (T, p. 473); later, we are

told that sympathy "produces our sentiment of morals in all the artificial virtues . . . also gives rise to many of the other virtues" (T, pp. 577-578), that sympathy provides an "explication of the moral sense" (T, p. 588), that "sympathy is the chief source of moral distinctions" (T, p. 618). From such statements, and from the general tenor of Hume's exposition, one might be led to interpret Hume as equating moral sentiments with sympathetic sentiments. On such an interpretation, the moral sense is nothing more than the human ability to sympathize.

Such an interpretation is given by Ingemar Hedenius.[17] Hedenius holds that Hume's attempt to "reduce the moral sense to a more general principle, that of sympathy, inevitably leads to an interpretation of all sympathy as moral approval or disapproval."[18] On Hedenius' interpretation, for one to experience a moral feeling, or the moral sentiment, is for one to experience "a sympathetic consciousness of the pleasure or pain of others."[19] Hume does seem to be saying just that in several places. For example, immediately after telling us that "the distinction of vice and virtue . . . has also a considerable dependence on the principle of sympathy so often insisted on, " Hume gives an explanation as follows:

> Every quality of the mind is denominated virtuous, which gives pleasure by the mere survey; as every quality, which produces pain, is call'd vicious. This pleasure and this

> pain may arise from four different sources. For we reap a pleasure from the view of a character, which is naturally fitted to be useful to others, or to the person himself, or which is agreeable to others, or to the person himself (T, p. 591)

Hume then points out in several places that "the happiness of strangers affects us by sympathy alone" (T, p. 619). Thus, Hume seems to be saying, when I contemplate a certain quality of mind or character, I consider its likely (or actual) effects on its possessor and on others; and in sharing their pleasures or pains through sympathy, I am thereby experiencing the moral sentiment.

Contrary to Hedenius, I do not believe that Hume ever held such a view. Hume holds that we cannot experience the moral sentiment unless we first take the moral point of view. Certainly, however, we can sympathize with others without taking the moral point of view; in fact, Hume insists that we sympathize more with loved ones and close acquaintances than with strangers. Hence, the moral sentiment cannot be identified with sympathetic sentiment. Hume also tells us that we are able to sympathize with animals (T, p. 481). Imagine the situation, then, in which we are contemplating the character of a dog which has a habit of mauling cats. We consider the pain and terror of his victims, and experience similar feelings through sympathy. If moral sentiments were no more than sympathetic sentiments, we must be said to be experiencing

the former in the present case. But Hume believes that it is only the characters of human beings which can arouse in us the moral sentiment.

Finally, we must remember that Hume holds that a moral sentiment is a "peculiar" kind of pleasure or pain. However, sympathy extends, not only to (non-sensational) pleasures and pains, but to all the passions, direct and indirect.

> The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature (T, pp. 575-576).

When I sympathize with a person in his anger, according to Hume, I feel anger; when I sympathize with a person in his joy, I too am joyful. Through sympathy, I come to experience passions; but, though Hume tells us that the experience of each passion is, in its own way, pleasant or unpleasant (T, p. 590), passions are not themselves pleasures or pains. Thus, the feelings that I experience through sympathy cannot, in general, be moral sentiments.

If Hume does not mean to identify moral sentiments with sympathetic sentiments, what does he mean to do? Most commentators conclude that sympathetic feelings do not constitute moral

sentiments, but rather are causal elements in the production of moral sentiments by the moral sense. My sympathy allows me to share the unpleasant emotional effects which are visited upon those who come into contact with a cruel character, and my sympathetic feelings induce in me, via the moral sense, an unpleasant moral sentiment. The moral sense remains a mysterious faculty; there is no explanation of how or why our sympathetic feelings trigger this moral sense, or why sympathetic feelings experienced outside the moral point of view do not. Nevertheless, this is the view which, for instance, Kemp Smith seems to attribute to Hume. I use here the word "seems" because Smith's account, like that of most others, is extremely vague on the relationship between sympathy and the moral sentiment. For instance, in Smith's section entitled "The Moral Effects of Sympathy," we find the following explanation:

> What [Hume] is maintaining is that sympathy . . . is a universal influence, as being the influence that renders man the specific type of creature that he is, namely, a creature so essentially social that even in his most self-regarding passions sympathy keeps others no less than the self constantly before the mind. It 'give[s] us the same pleasure, and therefore a pleasure that counts together with our own in our estimates of advantage and loss, and so ultimately also in our moral judgments of approval and disapproval.[20]

A bit further on, Smith continues:

> The verdict [viz., in a moral judgment] is owing to the peculiar fabric and constitution of our species; and in particular to the operation of sympathy, whereby we enter into the sufferings of others as into suffering of our own.[21]

But this interpretation does not answer the questions that Hume believes need answering: "It may now be ask'd in general, concerning this pain or pleasure, that distinguishes moral good and evil, From what principles is it derived, and whence does it arise in the human mind?" "Why [does] any action or sentiment upon the general view of survey, give a certain satisfaction or uneasiness?" To find only that sympathetic feelings are necessary to trigger a mysterious moral sense is not to "discover the true origin of morals," nor does it explain how "sympathy is the chief source or moral distinctions." I think Hume, in the Treatise, has given us far more than a description of the initial conditions necessary for the operation of the moral sense; I think he tells us what the moral sense is, and, true to his word, finds "some more general principles, upon which all our notions of morals are founded." As it turns out, there is for Hume no unique moral sense at all; what there is will be examined in the following section.

7

For Hume, it is only qualities of mind or characters which

can accurately be said to be virtuous or vicious.

> "Tis evident, that when we praise any actions, we regard only the motives that produced them, and consider the actions as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper . . . the ultimate object of our praise and approbation is the motive, that produc'd them (T, p. 417).
>
> If any action be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character (T, p. 575).

But a quality of mind for Hume is nothing but a tendency or disposition to behave in certain ways or to have certain passions; in themselves, such dispositions are not "real existences" which can be perceived in any direct way through the physical senses. Hence, according to Hume, we have no idea of mental qualities or characters independent of their expected behaviorial consequences; we can contemplate a mental quality or character only by contemplating certain actions or passions which we associate with that quality. This is why Hume says that "Virtue is consider'd as means to an end" (T, p. 619); a virtue, being a mental disposition, is nothing independent of its behaviorial consequences (real or imagined).

Thus, even if there were a uniquely moral sense, it could be affected only by ideas of those behaviors or passions which we associate with certain mental qualities. But now Hume makes a very important point:

> Now the pleasure of a stranger, for whom we have no friendship, pleases us only by sympathy (T, p. 576).
>
> ... the means to an end can only be agreeable, where the end is agreeable; and ... the good of society, where our own interest is not concern'd or that of our friends, pleases only by sympathy ... (T, p. 577).
>
> ... the public good is indifferent to us, except so far as sympathy interests us in it (T, p. 618).
>
> ... the happiness of strangers affects us by sympathy alone (T, p. 619).

Hume is saying that if we overlook our own personal desires, and suppress the enlivening power of sympathy, there is no way that the observation or contemplation of the emotional condition of others can emotionally affect us. How different this is from Hutcheson, for whom the moral sense is "a Determination of our Minds to receive amiable or disagreeable Ideas of Actions, when they occur to our Observation, antecedent to any Opinions of Advantage or Loss to redound to our selves from them" (italics mine). For Hutcheson, the idea of actions (inclusive of consequences) pleases or displeases us directly, through the moral sense. If Hume is truly a moral sense theorist, why cannot his moral sense operate without the intervention of sympathy? We could conclude with Kemp Smith that, for Hume, that is just the way it is, "owing to the peculiar fabric and constitution of our species."[22] But there is a better answer.

The key to what I take to be the proper interpretation of Hume

is found in the following two passages which, because of their importance, I will quote at length:

> Now 'tis certain, there are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, tho' they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation. These desires are of two kinds: either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good [viz., pleasure], and aversion to evil [viz., pain] consider'd merely as such (T, p. 417; italics mine).

> 'Tis obvious, that when we have the prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carry'd to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction. 'Tis also obvious, that this emotion rests not here, but making us cast our view on every side, comprehends whatever objects are connected with its original one by the relation of cause and effect. Here then reasoning takes place to discover this relation; and according as our reasoning varies, our actions receive a subsequent variation. But 'tis evident in this case, that the impulse arises not from reason, but is only directed by it. 'Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object: And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience (T, p. 414; italics mine).

That is, human beings are naturally constituted so that the idea of personal pleasure tends to induce a feeling of satisfaction or "propensity," while the idea of personal pain tends to induce a feeling of uneasiness or "aversion." These feelings, through a process of association based on cause and effect relationships, come to be

directed toward the causes of our anticipated pleasures or pains. Hume also points out that the case is the same where the pleasures or pains are actual rather than imagined:

> The mind by an original instinct tends to unite itself with the good, and to avoid the evil, tho' they be conceived merely in idea, and be consider'd as to exist in any future period of time. But supposing that there is an immediate impression of pain or pleasure, and that arising from an object related to ourselves or others, this does not prevent the propensity or aversion ... That propensity, which unites us to the object, or separates us from it, still continues to operate ... (T, pp. 438-439).

I want to argue that this "consequent emotion of aversion or propensity," this "uneasiness or satisfaction," to which Hume refers is itself, when generated under the proper conditions, defined to be the moral sentiment, and that there is no moral sense properly so called. The proper conditions are: adopting the moral point of view (i. e., ignoring personal interests and desires and considering the effects of behaviors and actions on society at large), and sympathizing with society at large.

Hume is not stipulating this definition of the moral sentiment, nor is it taken to be an expression of what Hume calls a "relation of ideas," or a necessary truth. Rather, it is what might be called a "definition in use," which Hume discovers in his "experiments ... from a cautious observation of human life ... as they appear in the

common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures" (T, p. xix). Hume is claiming that, in fact, when men, both in the past and present, have referred to moral sentiments, they have referred to this aversion or propensity, generated under the proper conditions. We see the same sort of empirical derivation of a definition in Hume's discussion of cause and effect. Hume's definition (actually, he gives two) of cause is obtained by examining "with the utmost accuracy those objects, which are commonly denominated causes and effects" (T, p. 170).

How does the moral sentiment come about? For example, suppose I dislike milk and my host places before me what I take to be a glass of that liquid. My idea of the unpleasant taste produces in me an aversion, which becomes directed at the milk itself. This is an interested sentiment, proceeding as it does from my personal dislike for milk. Or, suppose my friend is in the habit of stealing. I might take a very limited view of the situation, and sympathize only with the pleasures my friend receives from his actions. In so doing, I experience pleasure myself, which becomes the object of an emotional propensity or attraction. The "object" which affords me this sympathetic pleasure is my friend, whose criminal nature disposes him to commit these crimes which accrue to his advantage. Thus, my propensity soon directs itself to my friend, and to his

penchant for mischief. Again, however, this propensity is not the moral sentiment, for it proceeds not from the moral point of view, a view which considers the interests of all.

If, in this example, I extend my view to include the victims of my friend, the disagreeable feelings I experience in sympathy with them will (most likely) outweigh the agreeable feelings I experience in sympathy with my friend, and a feeling of aversion will arise in me, which will soon "extend" to my friend's character. This, then, is a moral sentiment: it is an emotional reaction to unpleasant feelings which I experience as a result of a sympathy extended by the moral point of view.

This new interpretation of the moral sentiment explains much of what has been unclear in Hume. No longer do we see Hume as postulating the existence of some mysterious faculty called the "moral sense." Moral distinctions are now seen to be rooted in nothing more mysterious than the well-known human instinct to be attracted to pleasant feelings and repelled by unpleasant ones. Rather than merely giving conditions for the activation of a moral sense, we see that Hume really does resolve the moral sense itself into principles more general.

No longer must it remain unexplained why adoption of the moral point of view is necessary for the experiencing of the moral

sentiment. Hume has told us that " 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil" (T, p. 472). As long as we understand Hume to be holding a moral sense theory, this statement must be taken as empirical, a mere description of that "peculiar fabric and constitution of our species." On my interpretation, however, Hume's statement is seen to be a definition; and no longer need we wonder why we can't experience the moral sentiment unless we first adopt the moral point of view.

There are a number of other areas that lend themselves to the present interpretation. According to Hume, "the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil" which, I maintain, constitute the moral sentiments under the proper conditions,

> tho' they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation .. they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are suppos'd to proceed from the same faculty, with that, which judges of truth and falsehood. Their nature and principles have been suppos'd the same, because their sensations are not evidently different (T, p. 417).

Significantly, Hume later makes this same point when he is dealing specifically with the moral sentiment:

> Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of;

> tho' this feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle, that we are apt to confound it with an idea, according to our custom of taking all things for the same, which have any near resemblance to each other (T, p. 470).

Hume makes the statement that " 'Tis true, those sentiments, from interest and morals, are apt to be confounded, and naturally run into one another" (T, p. 472). This also adapts well to my interpretation. My feeling of aversion toward the glass of milk was the same kind of impression as my aversion toward my friend's criminal nature, and thus these impressions feel the same. Yet, the first impression is an interested sentiment whereas the second is a moral sentiment; they are differentiated only by the conditions of their genesis. A man "of temper and judgment," as Hume describes him, is more aware of when he has managed to overlook his own personal interests and consider the interests of all, and thus is better able to judge when his feeling of aversion or propensity is a moral or an interested sentiment. A less careful man is apt to get these sentiments "confounded."

For Hutcheson, the moral sense is a distinct God-given faculty which affords a unique kind of pleasure or pain upon the view of certain types of human behavior: those which display (or deny) benevolence. God could have designed our moral sense differently, however. For instance, as Hutcheson discusses in

one of his examples, our moral sense might have been constructed so as to afford us pleasure from the view of malice rather than that of benevolence. Hutcheson realizes that this raises the question of whether or not one type of moral sense could be considered to be (non-morally) preferable to another; he concludes that there must be such a preference, based on a particular moral sense's conformability to the more fundamental human disposition to be attracted to pleasure and repelled by pain:

> A Sense approving Benevolence would disapprove that Temper, which a Sense approving Malice would delight in... Any rational Nature observing two Men thus constituted, with opposite Senses, might by reasoning see, not moral Goodness in one Sense more than in the contrary, but a Tendency to the Happiness of the Person himself, who had the former Sense in the one Constitution, and a contrary Tendency in the opposite Constitution: nay, the Persons themselves might observe this ... Thus one Constitution of the moral Sense might appear to be more advantageous to those who had it, than the contrary; as we may call that Sense of Tasting healthful, which made wholsome Meat pleasant; and we would call a contrary Taste pernicious.[23]

But Hume, on my interpretation, has no need to show that our moral sense, as actually constituted, accords with our natural propensity toward pleasure because this sense is resolved into our basic emotional reaction to pleasure and pain, conditioned in the proper way by a general sympathy. Hume seems to be making this point in the following passage taken from the section entitled "Conclusion of this book," and there can be little doubt that he has

Hutcheson in mind here.

> Those who resolve the sense of morals into original instincts of the human mind [for instance, Hutcheson], may defend the cause of virtue with sufficient authority; but want the advantage which those possess, who account for that sense by an extensive sympathy with mankind. According to their system, not only virtue must be approv'd of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles, from whence it is deriv'd. So that nothing is presented on any side, but what is laudable and good (T, p. 619)

This resolution of the moral sense into an interplay between two of the most basic principles of human nature, sympathy and the natural emotional reaction to pleasure and pain, is quite in the spirit of Hume, who is constantly seeking for hypotheses susceptible to Occam's razor. The following are examples of Hume's many references to the need for keeping the number of basic principles to a minimum.

> Besides, we find in the course of nature, that tho' the effects be many, the principles, from which they arise, are commonly but few and simple, and that 'tis the sign of an unskillful naturalist to have recourse to a different quality, in order to explain every different operation. How much more must this be true with regard to the human mind ... To invent without scruple a new principle to every new phaenomenon, instead of adapting it to the old; to overload our hypotheses with a variety of this kind; are certain proofs, that none of these principles is the just one, and that we only desire, by a number of falsehoods, to cover our ignorance of the truth (T, p. 282).

> ... 'tis absurd to imagine, that in every particular instance,

> these moral sentiments are produc'd by an original quality and primary constitution . . . Such a method of proceeding is not conformable to the usual maxims, by which nature is conducted, where a few principles produce all that variety we observe in the universe, and every thing is carry'd on in the easiest and most simple manner (T, p. 473).

There is no need to postulate the existence of a separate sense or faculty in order to account for moral sentiments; Book III of the Treatise is Hume's attempt to show how this can be done by appealing only to the principles of sympathy and the instinctive human reactions to pleasure and pain.

Where, then, does Hume's moral sentiment, as I've interpreted it, belong in his classification of the impressions? As I tried to show earlier, Hume seems to contradict himself in attempting to maintain that the moral sentiment is both a kind of pleasure (or pain) and a passion. Unfortunately, there is nothing in my interpretation which eases this inconsistency.

The moral sentiment, on my interpretation, has all the marks of a passion. Most important of these is that the moral sentiment has an object - it is an aversion or propensity to something. Of the two kinds of impressions, those of sensation and those of reflection (the passions), only the latter are said to have an object for Hume. Moreover, the moral sentiment seems to be a direct passion, for it arises directly (i.e., without the operation of the principle of the

association of ideas or that of the association of impressions) from pleasure or pain, actual or contemplated: "By direct passions I understand such as arise immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure" (T, p. 276). As such, the moral sentiment cannot be a kind of pleasure or pain, as Hume so often insists, though its sensation, as that of all passions, may be pleasant or painful. Thus, the difficulty of placing the moral sentiment in his scheme of impressions remains a crucial problem for Hume.

REFERENCES

[1]Most commentators agree that Shaftesbury, Hutcheson's predecessor, is too unclear for one to determine with any certitude whether or not he did indeed espouse a moral sense theory. See, for instance, William K. Frankena, "Hutcheson's Moral Sense Theory," Journal of the History of Ideas, XVI, No. 3 (1955), pp. 357-358.

[2]From Hutcheson's "An Inquiry concerning Moral Good and Evil," in British Moralists, ed. Selby-Bigge (New York, 1964), I, p. 83.

[3]Ibid., p. 74.

[4]Ibid., pp. 72-73.

[5]Ibid., p. 72.

[6]Ibid., p. 175.

[7]Ibid., p. 394.

[8]Ibid., pp. 156-157.

[9]in Sellars and Hospers, Readings in Ethical Theory, pp. 363-388.

[10]in Journal of the History of Ideas, XVI, No. 3 (1955), pp. 357-358.

[11]Henning Jensen, Motivation and the Moral Sense in Francis Hutcheson's Ethical Theory, (The Hague, 1971), p. 48.

[12]Broad, pp. 369-370.

[13]Hutcheson, p. 73.

[14]Smith, p. 43.

[15]Strictly speaking, actions in themselves are morally neutral for Hume, and are included in moral considerations only as indicators of underlying qualities of mind or motives, which do have moral value. See, for example, (T, p. 477).

[16]Smith, p. 173.

[17]Ingemar Hedenius, Studies in Hume's Ethics, repr. from Adolf Phalen in Memoriam, Uppsala 1937.

[18]Ibid., p. 461.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Smith, pp. 174-175.

[21]Ibid., p. 197.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Hutcheson, p. 410.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOMAIN OF MORAL SUBJECTS

1

There are a few occasions where Hume seems to equate the moral sentiment with a sentiment of moral praise or blame. For instance,

> To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration (T, p. 471).

This, as it turns out, is a misleading statement of Hume's position, which is more clearly stated here:

> The pain or pleasure, which arises from the general survey or view of any action or quality of mind, constitutes its vice or virtue, and gives rise to our approbation or blame, which is nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred (T, p. 614; second set of italics mine)

The object of love or hate, Hume has told us, is always another person; thus, moral praise or blame, it would seem, is always directed at another person. Yet clearly Hume would allow that we often morally praise or blame ourselves; but Hume has told us that love and hate are always directed at another (T, p. 329). However, pride and humility are closely related to love and hate, and are

directed at our selves. We might paraphrase Hume, then, by describing moral self approbation or blame as nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible pride or humility. The cause of an indirect passion is always a "separate pleasure or uneasiness," which is closely associated with the object of the passion. Such pleasures and pains, as we have seen, often stem from the satisfaction of personal desires. But only if the pleasure or pain is a moral sentiment, as described in the last chapter, will the consequent love or hate (or pride or humility) be moral praise or blame.

Ultimately, Hume relies on an entity's potential for becoming an object of love or hate in order to determine the domain of moral subjects. Consider the moral sentiment as I have so far described it: it is the pleasure of an attraction or the pain of an aversion toward the ultimate cause of a sympathetic pleasure or pain, consequent to the adoption of the moral point of view. But this would let in too much to satisfy Hume, for this would allow moral sentiments to be directed toward inanimate objects and animals.[1] Let us imagine a robot, programmed to maim innocent people. We might adopt the moral point of view, and in sympathizing with the victims we experience painful sentiments; our aversion to our painful feelings is soon directed, via a chain of cause and effect reasoning, to the robot itself. Or, we might imagine a wild tiger to take the place of

the robot in the example. By a similar process, we come to experience toward the tiger that peculiar kind of pain which, according to Hume, constitutes aversion.

The question then arises of whether or not Hume will allow inanimate objects and animals to be subject to moral distinctions; or, to put it in another way, will Hume allow our aversion in these examples to be counted as a moral sentiment? At first, it appears that such a decision must be arbitrary; but Hume finds a criterion that gives him the basis for an answer. In his view, it is a contradiction for an object to be potentially virtuous or vicious and not be potentially an object of moral praise or blame. For instance, in denying that individual actions can have moral value, Hume gives as the reason that individual actions "have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility" (T, p. 575). The hidden premise is that what cannot be the object of love, hatred, pride, or humility (and hence what cannot be the object of moral praise or blame) cannot be virtuous or vicious. But Hume holds that only people can be the objects of love or hate, pride or humility. Since, then, inanimate objects and animals cannot be the objects of moral praise or blame, they cannot, on Hume's assumption, be virtuous or vicious; and propensities or aversions directed toward them cannot be counted as moral sentiments. Thus, Hume has added a further

condition to his (implicit) definition of the moral sentiment: it must be directed toward another human being. We find this condition stated in the following passage:

> Pride and humility, love and hatred are excited, when there is any thing presented to us, that both bears a relation to the object of the passion, and produces a separate sensation related to the sensation of the passion. Now virtue and vice are attended with these circumstances. They must necessarily be plac'd either in ourselves or others, and excite either pleasure or uneasiness; and therefore must give rise to one of these four passions; which clearly distinguishes them from the pleasure and pain arising from inanimate objects, that often bear no relation to us: And this is, perhaps, the most considerable effect that virtue and vice have upon the human mind (T, p. 473; italics mine).

There is yet a further restriction on what can count as a moral sentiment, and again it stems from the "original" restrictions on the indirect passions of love and hate. As we saw in my earlier discussion of these passions, the pleasure or pain caused in me must be strongly associated in idea with another person in order to cause in me love or hate. The case is the same with that love or hate which constitutes moral praise or blame. Imagine that I witness a hunter accidentally shoot his companion. I might take the moral point of view, and experience painful sentiments in sympathy with the injured man; my aversion soon directs itself to the ultimate cause of my uneasiness, namely, the first hunter. This aversion, it would seem, is a moral sentiment. This is not the case however.

Unless this pain of aversion can be strongly associated with the first hunter, it cannot cause in me the passion of hate. Because the shooting was accidental, and did not proceed from any character trait or intention in the first hunter, my pain is not closely associated with the hunter - no hate, or blame, ensues. My aversion is not a moral sentiment:

> If any action be either virtuous or vicious, 'tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider'd in morality ... This reflexion is self-evident, and deserves to be attended to, as being of the utmost importance in the present subject. We are never to consider any single action in our enquiries concerning the origin of morals; but only the quality or character from which the action proceeded. These alone are durable enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person (T, p. 575; second set of italics mine).

If I suspected that the shooting was intentional, or resulted from a habit of carelessness, the relevant association might become strong enough to cause hate; my feeling of aversion would then count as a moral sentiment, and my feeling of hate as moral blame.

Hume defines a virtue in terms of its potential for causing a moral sentiment. A virtue is "whatever mental quality in ourselves or others [which] gives us a satisfaction, by the survey or reflexion," and a vice is a mental quality that "gives uneasiness" in the same

manner (T, p. 575). Implicit in this definition of virtue are the conditions for the moral sentiment which I have developed above: it must be directed toward a person, it must be traceable to a mental trait of that person, and it must proceed from a sympathy widened in scope by the moral point of view.

2

A virtue, then, is any quality of mind which, when contemplated from the moral point of view, causes a certain satisfaction, and where this satisfaction stems directly from the experience of pleasant sympathetic feelings. As a result of this definition, Hume finds that many qualities of mind which are usually taken to be without moral value must now be counted as virtues. Such traits are commonly called "natural abilities"; among those that Hume mentions are good sense, genius, wit, humor, patience, resolution, and industry. An analogous situation obtains for what might ordinarily be called "natural disabilities," such as "prodigality, luxury, irresolution, and uncertainty (T, p. 611). These now must be counted as vices.

Upon examination, Hume finds that all traits which are considered as natural abilities share one or more of the following characteristics: they are useful to the possessor (as is wisdom),

they are immediately agreeable to the possessor (as is good humor), they are useful to others (as is genius), or they are immediately agreeable to others (as is wit). In this respect, at least, natural abilities cannot be distinguished from those traits commonly taken to be virtues. Moreover, if we adopt the moral point of view, and allow ourselves a general sympathy with the possessor of a natural ability and the people he affects, we find that we experience the pleasure of a propensity or attraction - and all the necessary conditions are met in order to christen this pleasure a moral sentiment. The mechanism here is exactly the same as we have already found for those mental qualities which are normally taken to be virtues. We get a similar situation in the production of aversion from the natural disabilities. Also, as in the case of virtue proper, our pleasure of attraction can cause love, and our pain of aversion can cause hate; and these feelings of love or hate must be counted as moral praise or blame.

On Hume's view, then, there is no distinction between natural and moral traits in their ability to affect our sentiments. But, Hume asks, what other criterion is there to differentiate them (T, p. 607)? The answer most commonly given is that natural abilities are "involuntary," while moral traits are subject to human free will. Hume believes that attention to this criterion is primarily

"why moralists have invented" the distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues (T, p. 609); however, he believes that this invention is totally unjustified.

First, Hume points out that, as a matter of fact, many of the qualities which are ordinarily considered to be virtues are as constant and inalterable as those traits considered to be natural abilities. As an example Hume mentions the virtue of magnanimity; such a trait cannot be nurtured or destroyed by a short-term act of will, and must be considered more involuntary than voluntary.

Hume next appeals to his definition of virtue to show that there is nothing in the definition which prevents an involuntary quality from being counted as a virtue:

> Moral distinctions arise from the natural distinctions of pain and pleasure; and when we receive those feelings from the general consideration of any quality or character, we denominate it vicious or virtuous. Now I believe no one will assert, that a quality can never produce pleasure or pain to the person who considers it, unless it be perfectly voluntary in the person who possesses it (T, p. 609).

Finally, Hume attacks the voluntary-involuntary distinction itself by appealing to his well-known analysis of free will and necessity, given in the Treatise's section entitled "Of liberty and necessity," in Book II.

Still, Hume points out, there is an initially plausible argument

for a distinction between virtues and natural abilities, even within the structure of Hume's own theory of the moral sentiment. "It may, indeed, be pretended, that the sentiment of approbation, which [natural abilities] produce, besides its being inferior, is also somewhat different from that, which attends the other virtues" (T, p. 607). Even if this were so, Hume continues, it does not merit witholding the appellation of "virtue" from the natural abilities; according to Hume, "each of the virtues, even benevolence, justice, gratitude, integrity, excites a different sentiment or feeling in the spectator" (T, p. 607).

It is now clear that Hume has all along been using "love" (and "hate") as a generic term, denoting a class of resembling passions. The members are similar in that they are all produced from the same double relation of impressions and ideas, and are directed toward another person with whom we associate a certain idea of pleasure. In addition, Hume implies, these passions are similar in the way they feel when experienced; we have no difficulty in recognizing each as a kind of love when we feel it:

> 'Tis altogether impossible to give any definition of the passions of love and hatred ... 'Twoul'd be as unnecessary to attempt any description of them ... because these passions of themselves are sufficiently known from our common feeling and experience (T, p. 329).

The kind of love which is produced depends on the nature of that pleasure which is associated with the object of the passion, and on the status of the object. For instance,

> Love and esteem are at the bottom the same passions, and arise from like causes. The qualities, that produce both, are agreeable, and give pleasure. But where this pleasure is secure and serious; or where its object is great, and makes a strong impression; or where it produces any degree of humility and awe: In all these cases, the passion, which arises from the pleasure, is more properly denominated esteem than love (T, p. 608).

Love, of any kind, is described by Hume as a "feeling of approbation." As we have seen, love produced under the proper conditions is moral approbation, and arises in response to those qualities of mind we call "virtues." But this love which constitutes moral praise may vary with variations in the pleasure or pain which is the moral sentiment, and Hume indicates that such variations in the moral sentiment do occur.

> . . . whenever we survey the actions and characters of men, without any particular interest in them, the pleasure or pain, which arises from the survey (with some minute differences) is, in the main, of the same kind, tho' perhaps there be a great diversity in the causes, from which it is deriv'd (T, p. 617; italics mine).

That such variations occur in the moral sentiment, and consequently in the passion of love that follows, does not stop us from

recognizing as virtues the various character traits we observe. Similarly, Hume argues, when we contemplate in the appropriate way those qualities commonly termed "natural abilities," the propensity we experience may indeed be slightly different in sensation than other moral sentiments; but this is no good reason to deny it the status of a moral sentiment, as those pleasures which arise upon contemplation of qualities commonly taken to be virtues themselves vary from one to the other.

Thus, the kind of love inspired by a natural ability will differ from those kinds produced by virtues proper; but even these latter differ among themselves. We have no good reason, then, to withold from the love inspired by the natural virtues the status of moral praise or approbation.

> The characters of Caesar and Cato, as drawn by Sallust, are both of them virtuous, in the strictest sense of the word; but in a different way: Nor are the sentiments entirely the same which arise from them. The one produces love; the other esteem... In like manner, the approbation, which attends natural abilities, may be somewhat different to the feeling from that, which arises from the other virtues, without making them entirely of a different species (T, pp. 607-608).

Because the sentiments which are excited by natural abilities are similar to those excited by virtues, and because "virtue" itself is defined in terms of sentiments, Hume concludes that natural abilities must be counted as virtues. Hume makes this point

succinctly in his essay "Of Some Verbal Disputes":

> Nothing is more usual that for philosophers to encroach upon the province of grammarians and to engage in disputes of words, while they imagine that they are handling controversies of the deepest importance and concern ... if, in short, the sentiments are similar which arise from [natural abilities] and from the social virtues, is there any reason for being so extremely scrupulous about a word, or disputing whether they be entitled to the denomination of virtues?

3

Hume believes that any object, animate or inanimate, can become an object of affection (or approbation) if it in some way becomes associated with pleasure. However, there are different "species" of affections corresponding to different types of objects. Hume does not tell us what the important divisions are in types of object, but it is clear that human beings and inanimate objects are two such classes.

> All the sentiments of approbation, which attend any particular species of objects, have a great resemblance to each other, tho' deriv'd from different sources; and, on the other hand, these sentiments, when directed to different objects, are different to the feeling, tho' deriv'd from the same source (T, p. 617).

What Hume is saying here can best be explained by example. Inanimate objects can give us pleasure in many ways. A painting

can give us pleasure through its beauty; a whirlpool bath can give us physical pleasure; a wonder drug can give us pleasure through sympathy with those it cures. Yet, even though these pleasures are derived differently, "from different sources," the affections produced toward these inanimate objects will be of the same kind or species - they will be very similar in sensation. Likewise, people can give us pleasure in various ways. A person can give us pleasure through a beautiful appearance, from physical sensation, from furthering our own interests, from his virtue. Again, though the pleasures differ, the affections produced as a result are of the same kind - in this case love. Thus, Hume is saying, no matter how the pleasure is derived, our affections for inanimate objects will always be of the same kind, and our affection for people will be of another kind, love. Hume goes on to point out that this remains the case even when the pleasure received from an inanimate object is the same as that received from another person. A mechanical sexual partner might give the same physical pleasure as a human partner, but the affections produced will still be different in kind. Similarly, "a convenient house, and a virtuous character, cause not the same feeling of approbation; even tho' the source of our approbation be the same, and flow from sympathy and an idea of their utility" (T, p. 617).

Hume's theory of the passions is often attacked on the grounds that it mistakes a logical relation between passion and object for a contingent relation.[2] A passion for Hume is a simple impression, and its object is that entity to whose idea we are led whenever we experience the passion. The identifying characteristic of a passion is its sensation; but because we cannot be given the idea of an impression unless we first experience that impression, Hume can only describe the passions "by an enumeration of such circumstances, as attend them" (T, p. 277). One aspect of these circumstances is the object of a passion - that entity to whose idea we are led whenever we experience the passion. As we have seen, Hume restricts the objects a passion can have. For instance,

> 'Tis evident, that pride and humility, tho' directly contrary, have yet the same OBJECT. This object is self ... Here the view always fixes when we are actuated by either of these passions ... No one can doubt but this property is natural from the constancy and steadiness of its operations. 'Tis always self, which is the object of pride and humility (T, pp. 277-280).

> ... so the object of love and hatred is some other person ... This is sufficiently evident from experience. Our love and hatred are always directed to some sensible being external to us ... (T, p. 329).

Hume's restrictions on the possible objects of passions are contingent. A passion is a simple impression, and its idea is also simple; as such, according to Hume, its idea can have no logical or

necessary connection with any other idea. The range of possible objects of a certain passion can only be derived in experience; we see that, as a matter of fact, the object of pride is always self, and the object of love is always another person. Although human nature is so constituted, by "an original quality or primary impulse" (T, p. 280), that the idea of self always follows that passion which Hume calls "pride," it is conceivable that the same passion be followed by the idea of another; and even though the idea of another person always follows that passion which Hume calls "love," it is conceivable that the same passion be followed by the idea of an inanimate object.

However, Árdal argues that "contrary to Hume's view, one must insist that it would be logically absurd to suggest that a man might have the passion of pride, and, at the same time, that the object of this pride (in Hume's sense of 'object') is another and not the person himself."[3] For Árdal, "pride" denotes more than just a feeling; it refers to a complex phenomenon which includes certain overt behavior patterns. Being proud may include the occasional experiencing of prideful feelings, but it may not. "A man is not only proud when he is, and so long as he is, experiencing the glow of the feeling of pride, and he may in fact be proud though he sincerely claims that he does not have this glow . . . A man is not at

all the best judge himself as to whether he is a proud man."[4] Árdal agrees that there is a sense in which self is the object of pride, but it is not that a feeling of pride directs our attention to ourselves. Rather, it is that pride is defined as an expression of self-valuing. It is therefore logically impossible to have pride without this self-valuing.

I think Árdal's account of pride is more accurate than Hume's, insofar as it more adequately reflects what we ordinarily mean by "pride." But Hume is not concerned with language usage. His point is that there are certain feelings which all human beings experience. Some are bodily sensations; others are what he calls "passions" or "emotions." These feelings can be named. Now, experience shows that certain of these feelings tend to arise under certain circumstances; Hume describes these circumstances for pride, humility, love, and hate. The circumstances surrounding pride and humility include the thought of one's self, and those surrounding love and hate include the thought of another; but there is no logical connection between these feelings and their attendant circumstances.

The disagreement between Hume and Árdal may be illustrated as follows. Most of us know what it is to experience a toothache. For Hume, "toothache" might name a certain kind of physical pain.

If we did an empirical study, we would find that this sensation is usually accompanied by the presence of a tooth which can be shown to be decayed. However, there is no logical relation between the pain and the decayed tooth. This same pain might very well be induced in a toothless person by placing an electrode at the proper point in the brain. For Hume, such a person would be experiencing a toothache even though he had no teeth. However, on an "Árdalian" interpretation, this pain would not be a toothache because, by definition, a toothache would involve the presence of a tooth.

As long as Hume is considering mere feelings, he cannot be accused of confusing logical and contingent relations; and he makes it clear that this is just what he is doing in his discussion of the passions:

> But not to dispute about words, I observe, that by pride I understand that agreeable impression, which arises in the mind, when the view either of our virtue, beauty, riches or power makes us satisfy'd with ourselves: And that by humility I mean the opposite impression ... Let us, therefore, examine these impressions, consider'd in themselves; and enquire into their causes ... (T, pp. 297-298).

It may very well be, as Árdal argues, that our concepts of passions such as pride and love include more than just the ideas of certain feelings. Yet, it does seem that there are certain distinct feelings which are characteristic of pride and love; and these are the feelings

with which Hume is concerned.

Now Hume does not deny that, in fact, different passions have associated with them, in addition to certain types of objects, certain kinds of behavior patterns or dispositions. For instance:

> Love is always follow'd by a desire of the happiness of the person lov'd, and an aversion to his misery: As hatred produces a desire of the misery and an aversion to the happiness of the person hated (T, p. 367).

Such desires and aversions will tend to motivate certain kinds of action. But once again, according to Hume, the passions of love and hate are logically distinct from their usual accompaniments:

> Love and hatred might have been unattended with any such desires, or their particular connexion might have been entirely revers'd. If nature had so pleas'd, love might have had the same effect as hatred, and hatred as love (T, p. 368).

The most that can be said against Hume is that he is mistaken in believing that there is a distinct feeling or impression which is characteristic of each of the passions. Though I tend to side with Hume in the cases of love and hate, and perhaps pride and humility, this criticism does seem accurate when we consider the wide range of the Humean passions: envy, pity, ambition, generosity, grief, fear, despair, etc. Contrary to Hume, there does not seem to be a different unique feeling peculiar to each of these;

and thus we may accuse Hume of a failure in his introspections. But even in these cases it is misleading to accuse Hume of mistaking a logical relation for a contingent relation. Such an accusation implies that there really are two or more entities whose relation has been mistakenly identified, for instance, a feeling on the one hand and, on the other, the complex consisting of the object of the passion and a set of dispositions to behave in certain ways. But the substance of the criticism is that, for at least some of what Hume calls the "passions," there is only the latter; and though this may be so, Hume's error lies in believing that there is the former also, and not in mistaking a logical relation for a contingent one.

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[1]I believe it is here that Hume's conflict as to the status of the moral sentiment originates. On the one hand, Hume wants to maintain that the moral sentiment causes us to love or hate (i. e., praise or blame); in this capacity the moral sentiment must be viewed as a kind of pleasure or pain, or impression of sensation. But, on the other hand, Hume wants to hold that the moral sentiment has an object - namely, those mental qualities which are virtues or vices; and in this capacity the moral sentiment must be treated as a passion, or impression of reflection.

[2]See, for example, Árdal, pp. 23-27.

[3]Árdal, p. 23.

[4]Ibid., p. 22.

CHAPTER V

THE MORAL SENTIMENT IN HUME'S AN INQUIRY CONCERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS

1

An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals was published in 1752; it is a revision of Book III of the Treatise, which had been published twelve years earlier. The Treatise itself was largely ignored by Hume's contemporaries, prompting him to bemoan the work as having fallen "deadborn from the press." Hume for the most part attributed the failure of the Treatise to a difficult style, one which did not appeal to the general reading public. Yet, Hume's dissatisfaction with the Treatise came to run much deeper than a distaste for its literary quality; his avowed goal in the Treatise of uncovering positive principles of human nature later seemed to Hume to be the reflection of an unwarranted youthful optimism:

> I am apt, in a cool hour, to suspect, in general, that most of my Reasonings will be more useful by containing Hints and exciting People's Curiousity than as containing any Principles that will augment the Store of Knowledge that must pass to future ages. [1]

> Above all, the positive Air, which prevails in that Book [the Treatise], and which may be imputed to the Ardor of Youth, so much displeases me, that I have not Patience to review it. [2]

In the years following publication of the Treatise, Hume attempted to make amends by revising separately each book of the Treatise. An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, published in 1748, is a revision of Book I, and A Dissertation on the Passions, which was published in 1757, is a revision of Book II. There are two important differences between Book I and An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding. Hume's principle of the association of ideas serves a major role in the Treatise: "here is a kind of ATTRACTION, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to shew itself in as many and as various forms" (T, p. 13). Hume relies on the principle to explain the origin of many of our complex ideas, such as that of substance, and to explain the mechanisms of belief and sympathy. This principle of association does appear in An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, but its importance there is considerably diminished, in accord with Hume's growing pessimism about finding such basic principles of human nature. Hume's strongest statement about the role of the principle now becomes:

> These loose hints I have thrown together in order to excite the curiousity of philosophers, and beget a suspicion at least if not a full persuasion that this subject is very copious, and that many operations of the human mind depend on the connection or association of ideas which is here explained (IU, p. 39).

In later editions of the Inquiry, even this statement is omitted, along with several pages containing illustrations of the workings of the principle. In these later editions Hume's discussion of the principle is reduced to no more than three paragraphs.

The second change concerns the nature of the self. Book I of the Treatise contains an entire section, entitled "Of personal identity," in which Hume argues that we have no impression, and hence no idea, of that simple and unchanging existence which is supposed to constitute the self. We have only a series of impressions, or perceptions, the ideas of which become associated in the mind through the relations of resemblance, contiguity, and causation: "it follows, that our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas, according to the principles above explain'd" (T, p. 260). We have seen how this conflicts with his account of sympathy in the Treatise, which relies on "the idea, or rather impression of ourselves which is always intimately present with us" (T, p. 317). In addition, Hume comes to see that in arguing that the mind never perceives any unity in its distinct perceptions he is assuming the very thing he wishes to deny: that there is a continuing mental existence. In the Appendix of the Treatise Hume admits temporary defeat in this matter:

> In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences . . . For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflexions, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions (T, p. 636).

Yet it is apparent that whatever "more mature reflexions" Hume came upon in the interval between the Treatise and An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding they did not provide him with a solution to this problem of the self because it is nowhere mentioned in the Inquiry.

A Dissertation on the Passions is a revision of Book II of the Treatise; it is, according to Kemp Smith, "by general consent . . . the least satisfying of all his writings."[3] It is little more than a review of the "double relation" explanation of the origin of the passions found in the Treatise. In the Treatise this explanation relies heavily on the principle of association and on an ever present impression of the self; but on these two doctrines Hume has lost confidence since the writing of the Treatise, and his attempt to revise Book II with that in mind "is so shortened as to leave the argument barely intelligible."[4]

The main concern of this present chapter, though, is the

relation between Book III and its revision, An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. Kemp Smith believes that Book III is "the one Book of the Treatise which Hume contrived to rescue almost intact."[5] In spite of Hume's own claim, in his short autobiographical sketch entitled "My Own Life," that the Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals "is of all my writings, historical, philosophical, or literary, incomparably the best," I find it to be very unclear in its most important points, those regarding the relationship between sympathy and the moral sentiment. In the following I shall attempt to dispel some of this unclarity.

2

Initially Hume's argument in the Inquiry follows that of the Treatise. In order to discover "the true origin of morals," Hume first sets out to determine what it is that various types of virtues have in common. As in the Treatise, he finds that those characters considered to be social virtues all share the quality of being useful to society at large. A virtuous character is one which pleases us when contemplated in a certain manner; as before, then, Hume seeks to find those principles by which the usefulness of characters can please. Again, Hume argues that usefulness can please only if the end which it promotes pleases, and this end is the welfare of others.

How, then, can the happiness and pleasures of others please us?

> And if we would employ a little thought on the present subject we need be at no loss to account for the influence of utility and to deduce it from principles the most known and avowed in human nature (I, p. 42).

The following crucial passage comes a few pages later:

> Usefulness is only a tendency to a certain end; and it is a contradiction in terms that anything pleases as means to an end where the end itself nowise affects us. If usefulness, therefore, be a source of moral sentiment, and if this usefulness be not always considered with a reference to self, it follows that everything which contributes to the happiness of society recommends itself directly to our approbation and good will. Here is a principle which accounts, in great part, for the origin of morality: and what need we seek for abstruse and remote systems when there occurs one so obvious and natural? (I, p. 47).

Understanding "approbation" as we did in the Treatise to mean "love" or "affection," and remembering that these passions can be caused in us only consequent to the production of a separate pleasure, we are again led to ask how it is that the pleasure of others can cause a pleasure in us. Hume offers the following cryptic answer in a footnote to the above passage:

> It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others? It is sufficient that this is experienced to be a principle in human nature. We must stop somewhere in our examination of causes; and there are, in every science, some general principles beyond which we cannot hope to find any principle more general. No

> man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others. The first has a natural tendency to give pleasure, the second pain. This everyone may find in himself. It is not probable that these principles can be resolved into principles more simple and universal, whatever attempts may have been made to that purpose. But if it were possible, it belongs not to the present subject; and we may here safely consider these principles as original - happy if we can render all the consequences sufficiently plain and perspicuous! (I, p. 47).

This short footnote is the key to understanding the alteration Hume's theory has undergone since the writing of the Treatise; nevertheless, it is a passage easily misinterpreted. On one reading, it might seem that "humanity" and "fellow-feeling" refer to the same principle in human nature, and from the description that follows, this principle might be taken to be that of sympathy. This hypothesis seems to be strengthened in the following several pages, where Hume gives numerous examples of a "sympathetic movement of pleasure and uneasiness."

> In general, it is certain that wherever we go, whatever we reflect on or converse about, everything still presents us with the view of human happiness or misery and excites in our heart a sympathetic movement of pleasure or uneasiness. In our serious occupations, in our careless amusements, this principle still exerts its active energy (I, pp. 48-49).

Kemp Smith adheres to this present interpretation which identifies humanity with sympathy: "The Enquiry concerning the Principles of

Morals is a restatement of [Book III of the Treatise], almost the only fundamental change being in respect of sympathy, which is now treated as an ultimate propensity of the Mind, and which he now also entitles sometimes 'benevolence' and sometimes 'humanity.'"[6] Thus, Smith interprets the footnote to be saying that Hume is abandoning the attempt to resolve the principle of sympathy into principles "more simple and universal," as was done in the Treatise. In this Smith is correct; but in misreading the passage he has gotten only half of Hume's meaning.

In the footnote Hume is discussing two different principles of human nature. One indeed is that of sympathy, or "fellow-feeling," which, as in the Treatise, is the human ability to communicate sentiments. In the pages immediately following the footnote Hume offers several detailed examples of sympathy in operation:

> We enter, I shall suppose, into a convenient, warm, well-contrived apartment ... The hospitable, good-humored, humane landlord appears ... His whole family, by the freedom, ease, confidence, and calm enjoyment diffused over their countenances, sufficiently express their happiness. I have a pleasing sympathy in the prospect of so much joy, and can never consider the source of it without the most agreeable emotions (I, p. 48).
>
> Every movement of the theater, by a skillful poet, is communicated, as it were, by magic to the spectators, who weep, tremble, resent, rejoice, and are inflamed with all the variety of passions which actuate the several personages of the drama (I, p. 49).

But mixed in with these illustrations of sympathy are cases which clearly are examples of something else:

> [The landlord] tells me that an oppressive and powerful neighbor had attempted to dispossess him of his inheritance and had long disturbed his innocent and social pleasures. I feel an immediate indignation arise in me against such violence and injury (I, p. 48; italics mine).
>
> But it is no wonder, he adds, that a private wrong should proceed from a man who had enslaved provinces, depopulated cities, and made the field and scaffold stream with human blood. I am struck with horror at the prospect of so much misery and am actuated by the strongest antipathy against the author (I, p. 48; italics mine).
>
> Where any event crosses our wishes and interrupts the happiness of the favorite characters, we feel a sensible anxiety and concern. But where their sufferings proceed from the treachery, cruelty, or tyranny of an enemy, our breasts are affected with the liveliest resentment against the author of these calamities (I, p. 49; italics mine).

These sentiments of resentment or indignation that we feel toward an evil-doer and his actions are not derived from sympathy with his victim; the victim may himself experience no such sentiments toward his tormentor, or he may even be dead, and presumably experiencing no sentiments at all with which we might sympathize. What, then, according to Hume, are these sentiments?

In reading the first appendix to the Inquiry, entitled "Concerning Moral Sentiment," we find that these sentiments of resentment fit the description of moral sentiments:

> It is requisite a sentiment should here display itself in order to give a preference to the useful above the pernicious tendencies. This sentiment can be no other than a feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery, since these are the different ends which virtue and vice have a tendency to promote. Here, therefore, reason instructs us in the several tendencies of actions, and humanity makes a distinction in favor of those which are useful and beneficial (I, p. 105).

Humanity is not sympathy, then. Although it is our sympathy with others that allows us to share in their feelings, it is our humanity that produces the propensity or aversion we feel toward the human causes of their feelings, and this propensity or aversion is none other than the moral sentiment:

> The same sentiments of the mind, in every circumstance, are agreeable to the sentiment of morals and to that of humanity . . . By all the rules of philosophy, therefore, we must conclude that these sentiments are originally the same, since in each particular, even the most minute, they are governed by the same laws and are moved by the same objects (I, p. 61).

Returning to the footnote, we see now that humanity and fellow-feeling are different; some of the examples which follow it illustrate one, some the other. "What sympathy then touches every human heart! What indignation against the tyrant whose causeless fear or unprovoked malice give rise to such detestable barbarity! (I, pp. 50-51); here again Hume alludes to the duality of the sentiments involved when we contemplate certain behaviors.

3

What is Hume's position in the Inquiry with respect to the connection between moral sentiments and sympathetic sentiments? On this point Hume is extremely vague. He does seem to indicate in several places that the operation of sympathy is necessary for the operation of humanity:

> If any man, from a cold insensibility of narrow selfishness of temper, is unaffected with the images of human happiness or misery, he must be equally indifferent to the images of vice and virtue (I, p. 52).

> ... these principles of humanity and sympathy enter so deeply into all our sentiments and have so powerful an influence as may enable them to excite the strongest censure and applause (I, p. 57).

We are also told that the moral sentiment is a kind of pleasure or, presumably, pain: "... we resolve the pleasure which arises from views of utility into the sentiments of humanity and sympathy" (I, p. 97).

I have argued that, in the Treatise, a moral sentiment is nothing more than an instinctive aversion or propensity to pain or pleasure, where this pain or pleasure is derived under certain special conditions. On this interpretation, Hume is not postulating a moral sense theory in the Treatise. This seems no longer to be the case in the Inquiry.

> It is not probable that these principles [humanity and sympathy] can be resolved into principles more simple and universal, whatever attempts may have been made to that purpose . . . we may here safely consider these principles as original (I, p. 47, footnote).

Kemp Smith has interpreted the footnote from which this quote derives as saying nothing more than that Hume is abandoning the attempt to explain the mechanism of sympathy by appealing to principles more basic, such as the association of ideas. However, if I am correct, Hume is also doing something much more important - he is no longer resolving the moral sentiment, or the sentiment of humanity, into a sentiment more basic, such as the natural emotional reaction to pleasure or pain. He has, in fact, come to embrace a legitimate moral sense theory, with the role of the moral sense being played by humanity.

The picture we are given in the Inquiry is of a partnership between sympathy and humanity, each conditioning and reinforcing the other. Our sense of humanity is "original," as fundamental as the physical senses. It is so constituted as to give us a peculiar kind of displeasure (or pleasure) upon the view or contemplation of the human causes of misery (or happiness); this displeasure Hume variously describes as "indignation," "resentment," and "prejudice." It is our sympathy that makes us more sensitive to the presence of misery or happiness in others, and thus increases the range and

power of our sense of humanity. On the other hand, our sentiment of indignation toward an evil-doer augments our sympathy with his victims, and allows us to share even more intensely their feelings of misery and pain. As I showed earlier, Kemp Smith offers a similar interpretation of Book III of the Treatise, and thus he is led to conclude that there is no major change in Hume's position in the Inquiry. I am arguing that there is a profound change, from the view of the Treatise that our so-called "moral sense" can be resolved into our (properly conditioned) natural aversion to pain and propensity for pleasure, to the view of the Inquiry that there is in human beings a true moral sense, humanity, which provides us with the unique kind of pleasures and pains which are the moral sentiments.

My argument finds additional support in comparing the Treatise to the Inquiry with respect to treatment of the moral point of view. In the Treatise Hume insists that we cannot experience a moral sentiment unless we have adopted the moral point of view. As I argued earlier, if we interpret Hume as there advocating a moral sense theory, we are left with no explanation, nor can we expect any, of why it is that this moral sense cannot operate unless the moral point of view has been completely and successfully adopted. If we interpret Hume in the way I suggest, however, it becomes true by definition that we cannot experience a moral sentiment unless we first

take the moral point of view. Now I am maintaining that Hume is proposing a moral sense theory in Inquiry; does he therefore now encounter a difficulty with the necessity of the moral point of view?

A careful examination of the Inquiry reveals that he does not, for he no longer insists that the moral point of view is a necessary prerequisite for moral sentiments. More than this, Hume never specifically mentions the moral point of view at all. His view now is that humanity continues to operate, and to produce the moral sentiments, even though selfish considerations are not eliminated. These moral sentiments may be over-shadowed by the selfish sentiments, but they exist nevertheless, and can be recognized if we are careful:

> Let us suppose a person ever so selfish, let private interest have engrossed ever so much his attention, yet in instances where that is not concerned he must unavoidably feel some propensity of the good of mankind and make it an object of choice, if everything else be equal ... And if the principles of humanity are capable, in many instances, of influencing our actions, they must, at all times, have some authority over our sentiments and give us a general approbation of what is useful to society, and blame of what is dangerous or pernicious. The degrees of these sentiments may be the subject of controversy, but the reality of their existence, one should think, must be admitted in every theory or system (I, pp. 52-53).
>
> And if these sentiments, in most men, be not so strong as those which have a reference to private good, yet still they must make some distinction, even in persons the most de-

praved and selfish, and must attach the notion of good to a beneficent conduct, and of evil to the contrary (I, p. 55).

REFERENCES

[1]Letters (Grieg), i, pp. 38-39.

[2]Ibid., p. 187.

[3]Smith, p. 535.

[4]Ibid., p. 536.

[5]Ibid., p. 533.

[6]Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

THE MORAL SENTIMENT AND MORAL EVALUATION

1

My concern so far has been with the interpretation of the origin and nature of the moral sentiment in Hume. The task now is to determine the role of this moral sentiment in moral evaluation. Hume never clearly tells us what he takes a moral evaluation to be; one must go about the task of discovering his view by digging patiently, by weighing different possible interpretations, by being aware of what is not said as well as what is, and by paying strict attention to Hume's clearest statements about moral evaluations.

The most common interpretations of Hume on this issue can be divided into two general classes. In this chapter I will examine these interpretations in detail. I will try to show that each of these different interpretations has its own unique strength, in that it seems accurately to explain some important points Hume makes about moral evaluations; however, I will argue that both interpretations must ultimately be rejected, as they conflict with other crucial statements Hume makes with regard to the characteristics of moral evaluation. I will then offer a third interpretation of Hume on moral evaluation, one which seems to unite the strengths of the former interpretations, while avoiding their most serious drawbacks.

2

On the first type of interpretation, which Árdal terms the "Emotionist" interpretation, the very experience of a moral sentiment constitutes a moral evaluation. For instance, if I witness an act of killing and I come to experience a moral sentiment as a result, I have, according to the Emotionist interpretation, thereby morally evaluated, or judged, the act and its perpetrator; the act of evaluating consists in the having of the emotion, while the content of the evaluation is the emotion itself.

Such an interpretation of Hume can be found in numerous places. For instance, William K. Frankena says this:

> [Hume] goes on to suggest that precisely because we need or want a language in which to express, not just statements peculiar to ourselves but sentiments in which we expect all men are to concur with us, another language in which we may claim that our sentiments are justified and valid, we had to ' . . . invent a peculiar set of terms, in order to express those universal sentiments of censure or approbation . . .' This kind of an account of our normative discourse appears to me to be eminently wise. It is a language in which we may express our sentiments - approvals, disapprovals, evaluations, recommendations, advice, prescriptions - and put them out into the public arena for rational scrutiny and discussion. [1]

Although in this passage Frankena is primarily concerned with the function of ethical language, he makes it quite clear that he understands an act of moral evaluation for Hume to consist in the ex-

periencing of a certain sentiment.

We find the following in John W. Lenz's introduction to a collection of essays by Hume:

> A second tenet of both the Treatise and the essays, that moral and aesthetic evaluations are expressions of sentiment, attacks the rationalist contention that one can by means of "intellectual intuition" know what is good or bad ... Hume's view is that in finding something to be good or bad, beautiful or ugly, a person is reacting emotively to it; that in saying something is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, a person is expressing his feelings of approval or disapproval ... Because Hume is sometimes careless in his way of putting it, his position can easily be misunderstood. His view is not that in finding an object worthwhile, a person is describing or stating how he feels toward it ...[2]

Finally, Árdal also sees Hume as an Emotionist with respect to moral evaluation:

> The Emotionist contends that evaluations are emotions ... On [this] interpretation, the evaluation, it seems, could not be thought of as true or false, since feelings are not assessed in these terms ... I have stressed more than once that Hume most decidedly did not think his main concern was with moral language. It is Emotionism and not Emotivism that I have all along been attributing to him ... Approbation and blame are called by Hume 'nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred' ... In attributing Emotionism to Hume, we must bear in mind that he did not consider feeling and thinking to be different in kind; but this does not throw doubt upon the view that, to him, evaluations are emotions.[3]

There are numerous passages, in both the Treatise and An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, in which Hume can be

taken to support the Emotionist interpretation.

> Thus the course of the argument leads us to conclude, that since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment they occasion, that we are able to mark the difference betwixt them ... Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of ... (T, p. 470).

> To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration. (T, p. 471)

> 'Tis only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil (T, p. 472).

> In moral deliberations ... all the circumstances of the case are to be laid before us ere we can fix any sentence of blame or approbation ... The approbation which then ensues cannot be the work of the judgment but of the heart; and it is not a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment (I, p. 108).

The Emotionist interpretation accords well with Hume's concern to show the practicality of morality: "morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions" (T, p. 457). According to Hume, all deliberate actions (and these are the only kind which fall within the province of morality, indicating, as they do, durable principles of the character) proceed from an act of the will: "by the will, I mean nothing but the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or

new perception of our mind" (T, p. 399). In order, then, to discover what will "produce or prevent" deliberate actions, we must consider what Hume says about the causes of movements of the will.

Part III of Book II of the Treatise is titled "Of the will and direct passions"; here (T, p. 439) Hume tells us that the will, which he identifies with volition, is moved only by the direct passions of desire or aversion, which arise spontaneously from pleasure or pain, either actual (in impression) or imagined (in idea).[4] It is for this reason that Hume later states that "the chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain; and when these sensations are remov'd, both from our thought and feeling, we are, in a great measure, incapable of passion or action, of desire or volition" (T, p. 574).

Thus, because, according to Hume, moral evaluations in themselves are capable of influencing our deliberate actions, and because it is only the direct passions that can directly influence the will, an interpretation of Hume on moral evaluations must reveal an intimate connection between moral evaluations and the direct passions, one "so necessary, that in every well-disposed mind, it must take place and have its influence; tho' the difference betwixt these minds be in other respects immense and infinite" (T, p. 465). It is in this respect that the Emotionist interpretation is most attractive, for here

the act of moral evaluation is nothing more than the experiencing of a moral sentiment, which, as we have seen earlier, is itself a direct passion of propensity or aversion[5] arising from sympathetic pleasures or pains, and thus capable of influencing the will.

3

In spite of the appeal of the Emotionist interpretation, there are several important passages which make it clear to me that this interpretation does not represent Hume's final position. Let us suppose that I am morally evaluating a certain character A and another character B; if I judge that A and B are equally vicious or virtuous, on the Emotionist interpretation this can only mean that I judge that the moral sentiment I experience as a result of contemplating A is of equal intensity with that of the moral sentiment I experience as a result of contemplating B. But Hume offers several examples which show that often such comparisons of moral worth are not made in this way, and thus that the Emotionist account is inadequate:

> The approbation of moral qualities . . . proceeds entirely from a moral taste, and from certain sentiments of pleasure or disgust, which arise upon the contemplation and view of particular qualities or characters. Now 'tis evident, that these sentiments, whenceever they are deriv'd, must vary according to the distance of contiguity of the objects; nor can I feel the same lively pleasure from the virtues of a

> person, who liv'd in Greece two thousand years ago, that I feel from the virtues of a familiar friend and acquaintance. Yet I do not say, that I esteem the one more than the other (T, pp. 581-582).
>
> Our servant, if diligent and faithful, may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than Marcus Brutus, as represented in history; but we say not upon that account, that the former character is more laudable than the latter. We know, that were we to approach equally near to that renown'd patriot, he wou'd command a much higher degree of affection and admiration (T, p. 582).
>
> We blame equally a bad action, which we read of in history, with one perform'd in our neighbourhood t'other day: The meaning of which is, that we know from reflexion, that the former action wou'd excite as strong sentiments of disapprobation as the latter, were it plac'd in the same position (T, p. 584).
>
> When ... a good disposition is attended with good fortune, which renders it really beneficial to society, it gives a stronger pleasure to the spectator, and is attended with a more lively sympathy. We are more affected by it; and yet we do not say that it is more virtuous, or that we esteem it more ... The case is the same, as when we correct the different sentiments of virtue, which proceed from its different distances from ourselves. The passions do not always follow our corrections; but these corrections serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue (T, p. 585).

The moral sentiment, as I have interpreted it, is a propensity or aversion resulting from sympathetic pleasures or pains, consequent to taking the moral point of view. Yet, even after adopting the moral point of view, the strength of our sympathy will vary according to distance, time, resemblance, etc. The strength of the propensity or aversion will thus also vary with these factors. The

above examples show that we may judge A to be equally virtuous or vicious with B, even though the strength of the moral sentiments actually experienced as a result of contemplating A and B differ widely. It is hard to see how the Emotionist interpretation, under which an actually experienced moral sentiment is an evaluation, could account for this.

Moreover, Hume suggests that we can make moral judgments even though we are unable to adopt the moral point of view, and thus unable to experience a moral sentiment.

> But however the general principle of our blame or praise may be corrected by those other principles, 'tis certain, they are not altogether efficacious, nor do our passions often correspond entirely to the present theory. 'Tis seldom men heartily love what lies at a distance from them, and what no way redounds to their particular benefit; as 'tis no less rare to meet with persons, who can pardon another any opposition he makes to their interest, however justifiable that opposition may be by the general rules of morality. Here we are contented with saying, that reason requires such an impartial conduct, but that 'tis seldom we can bring ourselves to it, and that our passions do not readily follow the determination of our judgment (T, p. 583).

Once again the Emotionist interpretation proves inadequate, for it implies that there is no moral evaluation if there is no actual experience of a moral sentiment. We must look for an alternative interpretation. The most common one will be considered next.

4

Hume makes frequent reference to the correction of the sentiments which arise when we consider certain characters or actions. Sometimes we tend to let our personal interests and desires influence the way we look at a certain situation. In such cases we can try to correct the interested sentiments which result by reconsidering the situation from the moral point of view:

> 'Tis therefore from the influence of characters and qualities, upon those who have an intercourse with any person, that we blame or praise him. We consider not whether the persons, affected by the qualities, be our acquaintance or strangers, countrymen or foreigners. Nay, we overlook our own interest in the general judgments; and blame not a man for opposing us ... when his own interest is particularly concerned ... By this reflexion we correct those sentiments of blame, which so naturally arise upon any opposition (T, pp. 582-583; italics mine).

Of course, Hume is not saying that such a correction is desirable in all such cases, for we all are entitled to like or dislike people and their actions for personal reasons; it is only when we wish to make a moral evaluation that we would attempt such a correction.

However, as we have seen, even if we are successful in adopting the moral point of view, our sympathetic sentiments, and the resulting moral sentiments, will vary according to our proximity in distance or time to the situation we are evaluating. For instance,

suppose I actually witness a father murder his infant child; it is to be expected that the sentiments aroused in me will be extremely intense, as the horror of the act is played out before my eyes. Contrast this with my merely reading about such an incident that took place hundreds of years ago; it is natural to expect that the sentiments aroused will be somewhat tempered. Furt[illegible], the vividness of the account itself can be expected to influence the intensity of my emotions. Nevertheless, in all these cases it is precisely the same kind of act we are considering - and certainly we do not imagine that the moral worth of a character or action is in any way dependent on its geographic or temporal relation to the one judging it. So, says Hume, we soon learn to correct for such variations in our moral sentiments when we make moral evaluations.

> Besides, every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others; and 'tis impossible we cou'd ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons, only as they appear from his peculiar point of view. In order, therefore, to prevent those continual contradictions, and arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we fix on some steady and general points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation . . . and by that reflection we correct . . . momentary appearance (T, pp. 581-582).

This is to be contrasted with another sort of variation in our moral sentiments. If I witness first an act of murder and, shortly afterward, an act of theft, we would expect the moral sentiment

aroused in the first instance to be more intense than that aroused in the latter instance. Here, however, this variation is not due to a variation in my proximity to the situations; rather, this difference in the moral sentiments is taken to reflect a real difference in the degree of moral turpitude of the actions.

The second interpretation of Hume on moral evaluation, the Reflectivist account, seems able to explain how we can make a moral evaluation without feeling a moral sentiment, and also gives some sense to Hume's references to the correction of moral sentiments. On this interpretation of Hume, the making of a moral evaluation consists in the passing of a judgment about how one would feel in terms of the moral sentiment if one were to contemplate a certain character or action from the moral point of view; the content of such a judgment would be the proposition assented to. Such a judgment, and hence a moral evaluation, could be made though one had not adopted the moral point of view and hence were not experiencing a moral sentiment. Further, the Reflectivist position can be refined to correct for variations in temporal or geographical distance. Thus, the act of morally evaluating would consist in the making of a judgment about the degree of moral sentiment that would be produced if, both, one were to contemplate the character or action from the moral point of view and one were directly acquainted with

the character or action. In this way we can talk of "correcting" our actual sentiments, though, as Hume points out, "our passions do not readily follow the determination of our judgment" (T, p. 583); thus, for instance, though I may judge that my moral aversion to x would be much stronger if I were more directly acquainted with x, the moral sentiment that I actually feel toward x will likely remain the same.

There are a number of passages in which Hume does seem to be describing such a view of moral evaluation:

> Our servant, if diligent and faithful, may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than Marcus Brutus, as represented in history; but we say not upon that account, that the former character is more laudable than the latter. We know, that were we to approach equally near to that renown'd patriot, he wou'd command a much higher degree of affection and admiration (T, p. 582).

> We blame equally a bad action, which we read of in history, with one perform'd in our neighborhood t'other day: The meaning of which is, that we know from reflexion, that the former action wou'd excite as strong sentiments of disapprobation as the latter, were it plac'd in the same position (T, p. 584).

> All objects seem to diminish by their distance: But tho' the appearance of objects to our sense be the original standard, by which we judge of them, yet we do not say, that they actually diminish by the distance; but correcting the appearance by reflexion, arrive at a more constant and establish'd judgment concerning them, In like manner, tho' sympathy be much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and a sympathy with persons remote from us much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous; yet we neglect all these differences in our calm judgments concerning the characters of men ...

> And tho' the heart does not always take part with those general notions, or regulate its love and hatred by them, yet are they sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools (T, p. 603).

The following passage from An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals also suggests the Reflectivist interpretation:

> There is no necessity that a generous action, barely mentioned in an old history or remote gazette, should communicate any strong feelings of applause and admiration. Virtue, placed at such a distance, is like a fixed star which, though to the eye of reason it may appear as luminous as the sun in his meridian, is so infinitely removed as to affect the senses neither with light nor heat (I, p. 57).

Often, even those commentators who offer a Reflectivist interpretation of Hume do not do full justice to the potential of such an account. For instance, Geoffrey Hunter attributes to Hume the view that "a moral judgment states that there is a causal relation between the contemplation by the speaker of some actual or imagined state of affairs and a certain sort of feeling or sentiment that he has when he does the contemplating."[6] However, Hunter's formulation fails to emphasize that the "contemplation by the speaker" must be of a very special sort - namely, contemplation from the moral point of view. According to Hume, one cannot experience a moral sentiment unless one has adopted the moral point of view. Secondly, Hunter's formulation does not take into account variations

in the moral sentiment caused by variations in distance and time, and hence makes no contribution to understanding what Hume means by the "correction" of moral sentiments. Yet, as I have pointed out, the capability to make such a contribution can be built into a Reflectivist account.

One of the most carefully formulated Reflectivist interpretations of Hume is found in Kydd's Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise. Kydd understands Hume to be saying that for one to judge that x is good is for one to judge that "x is the kind of thing which, considered without regard to the special relation in which it stands to my personal interests, arouses feelings of pleasure in me or any other disinterested spectator of like susceptibilities."[7] In this formulation there is present the required reference to the moral point of view; moreover, though it is not obvious from the formulation itself, Kydd elsewhere makes it clear that "the special relation in which it stands to my personal interests" includes "my particular standpoint in space and time."[8]

It should be noted in passing that Kydd's reference to "disinterested spectators of like susceptibilities" is circular in her account, because she offers no independent criterion for determining "like susceptibility." Thus, someone who experienced pleasure when contemplating, from the moral point of view, an act of murder would,

on Kydd's account, not be a person of like susceptibility. However, on my interpretation of the moral sentiment, "like susceptibility" could be defined without circularity: it would be the ability to sympathize with others, along with possession of an instinctive propensity for pleasure and aversion to pain.

5

Although there may be differences in formulations of Reflectivist interpretations of Hume, they all have one characteristic in common: they hold that to morally evaluate x is to judge, or come to believe, that a certain kind of contemplation of x would cause one to experience certain feelings; that is, to judge or come to believe that x is vicious (virtuous) is to judge or come to believe that contemplation of x from the moral point of view would cause one to experience the unpleasant (pleasant) moral sentiment. However, in the present section I wish to show that such a judgment is of a kind which Hume quite clearly denies to constitute a moral evaluation, and thus that the Reflectivist interpretation too must be rejected.

Book I of the Treatise, "Of the Understanding," is devoted to describing the intellectual faculties of man. Hume argues that man has the ability to reason in two different ways: demonstratively and probabilistically. Demonstrative reasoning is concerned with

the comparison of ideas only, and consists in the intuition of one or more of the following relations between ideas: resemblance, proportions in quantity and number, degrees of any quality, and contrariety (T, p. 79). For instance, if I "consider and compare" the idea of twice two with the idea of four, I immediately perceive, through an "act of the understanding," that the ideas are related by an equality in number. Hume sometimes speaks of demonstrative reasoning as the "discovery" of relations between ideas (T, p. 464 n.).

Apparently, Hume considers the discovery of such a relation between ideas to be equivalent to the assent to or formation of a belief in a certain proposition, namely, that proposition which asserts that the ideas are related by that relation. Thus, when I compare the ideas of twice two and the idea of four and I discover the relation of equality in number to hold between them, I thereby have come to believe the proposition that twice two is equal to four. Moreover, according to Hume, if I really do have the idea of twice two and the idea of four before my mind, it is impossible for me to conceive, or imagine, them to be related by a non-equality in number. Hume would express this by saying that it is impossible to conceive of the proposition that twice two is not equal to four. Such is the case with all propositions which express a relation between ideas; they are immediately assented to upon conceiving them, and their opposites

are "unintelligible" (T, p. 95).

Demonstrative reasoning, being concerned with the nature of our ideas only, is as close to certainty as man can ever achieve; it provides the basis for the "exact" sciences of algebra and arithmetic, "the only sciences, in which we can carry on a chain of reasoning to any degree of intricacy, and yet preserve a perfect exactness and certainty" (T, p. 71).

Probable reasoning, on the other hand, terminates in the belief in the existence (past, present, or future) of external objects or their qualities which are not "immediately present to the senses" (T, p. 73).[9] Such reasoning is also called "reasoning by cause and effect" or "matter of fact" reasoning. The first phase in all such reasoning is the experience of an impression of an external object, either from the senses or from memory (T, pp. 84-86).[10] For instance, I receive the visual impression of a man kicking a ball. What follows immediately, according to Hume, is the lively idea of the ball in flight; this lively idea constitutes a belief or expectation in the imminent flight of the ball. This complex phenomenon, the transition from an impression of one object to a belief in another object (or a belief in another state or quality of the same object), constitutes for Hume an instance of probable reasoning.

Hume's analysis of cause and effect reasoning is perhaps his

most well-inown philosophical effort. What Hume shows is that such reasoning, though necessary and unavoidable in daily life, can never be justified in any given instance; and for Hume, to justify the use of probable reason would be to show that the conclusion reached (i. e., the proposition believed) as a result of such reason is likely to be true. His first step in his proof is to show that cause and effect reasoning is not demonstrative reasoning, in that it does not depend on the nature of our ideas alone. From the idea (or impression) alone of a man kicking a ball, no idea can be shown to follow demonstratively; that is, starting with the idea of a man kicking a ball as a cause, we can conceive of anything as the effect, for instance that the man disappears and the ball becomes a pumpkin. Our idea of a cause and our idea of the effect are always, according to Hume, logically (demonstratively) unrelated:

> May I not clearly and distinctly conceive that a body, falling from the clouds and which in all other respects resembles snow, has yet the taste of salt or feeling of fire? Is there any more intelligible proposition than to affirm that all the trees will flourish in December and January, and will decay in May and June? Now, whatever is intelligible and can be distinctly conceived implies no contradiction and can never be proved false by any demonstrative argument or abstract reasoning a priori (IU, p. 49).

Since cause and effect reasoning cannot be justified by an appeal to the nature of our ideas alone, as can demonstrative reasoning, if

it is to be justified it must be done by an appeal to the nature of our experience. In our experience we see many instances of a certain type of cause followed by a certain type of effect. Thus, we might imagine, when I now receive the impression of a similar cause my belief or expectation in the existence of a similar effect is justified (i.e., likely to be true) because experience shows that it is highly probable that such an effect will follow such a cause. Now Hume does admit that cause and effect reasoning requires prior experience of similar sets of causes and effects:

> 'Tis therefore by EXPERIENCE only, that we can infer the existence of one object from that of another. The nature of experience is this. We remember to have had frequent instances of the existence of one species of objects; and also remember, that the individuals of another species of objects have always attended them, and have existed in a regular order of contiguity and succession with regard to them ... Without any farther ceremony, we call the one cause and the other effect, and infer the existence of the one from that of the other. In all those instances, from which we learn the conjunction of particular causes and effects, both the causes and effects have been perceiv'd by the senses, and are remember'd: But in all cases, wherein we reason concerning them, there is only one perceiv'd or remember'd, and the other is supply'd in conformity to our past experience (T, p. 87).

But Hume denies that cause and effect reasoning is justified by experience. His argument is most elegantly and succinctly phrased in An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding:

> For all inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities. If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless and can give rise to no inference or conclusion. It is impossible, therefore, that any arguments from experience can prove this resemblance of the past to the future, since all these arguments are founded on the supposition of that resemblance (IU, p. 51).

To paraphrase Russell's synopsis of the argument, experience can tell us about the nature of past futures, for instance that they have resembled past pasts. But experience can tell us nothing about the nature of future futures unless we assume what we are trying to show by an appeal to experience: namely, that the future will resemble the past.[11]

Hume thus concludes that, because the beliefs generated in matter of fact reasoning cannot be justified by an appeal to ideas or to experience, they cannot be justified at all. But it is not Hume's intention to show that we reach such beliefs on the basis of fallacious arguments, because Hume's stroke of genius is his contention that we do not reach such beliefs by any argument at all. Rather, Hume argues that when we experience a similar set of cause and effect many times, we involuntarily form a mental habit: when we now experience the impression of a similar cause, our imagination instinctively and immediately forms the lively idea of the effect, and this lively idea

constitutes a belief or expectation:

> Now as we call everything CUSTOM, which proceeds from a past repetition, without any new reasoning or conclusion, we may establish it as a certain truth, that all the belief, which follows upon any present impression, is deriv'd solely from that origin. When we are accustom'd to see two impressions conjoin'd together, the appearance or idea of the one immediately carries us to the idea of the other (T, pp. 102-103)

> Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses (IU, pp. 58-59).

Even so, Hume does consider cause and effect reasoning to be a legitimate form of reasoning; though, as we have seen, the process involved in such reasoning is far different from that in demonstrative reasoning, Hume maintains that both are functions of our intellectual faculty, the understanding:

> The understanding exerts itself after two different ways, as it judges from demonstration or probability; as it regards the abstract relations of our ideas, or those relations of objects, of which experience only gives us information (T, p. 413).

Hume maintains that when we reason we "discover" or "perceive" something. When we reason from demonstration, we perceive a relation between ideas. What do we perceive when we reason from cause and effect? We do not perceive any relation between cause and

effect because, according to Hume, there is none present to either our senses or our intellect. Nor do we perceive the effect which we are expecting, for we have no impression of the effect at the time that we are reasoning. What we end up with in such reasoning is a belief in the existence of an unperceived effect, which is nothing more than a lively idea of that effect. Hume equates this with the discovery or perception of the proposition that a certain effect has (or will have) existence (T, pp. 96-97 n., pp. 97-98). Perception of objects is accomplished through the impressions of sensation; perception of propositions is accomplished by the understanding, via its processes of demonstrative and probable reasoning. It seems clear that in the following, "objects of reason" refers to propositions:

> Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood. Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason (T, p. 458).

> All the objects of human reason or inquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to with "Relations of Ideas," and "Matters of Fact." Of the first kind are the sciences of Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic, and, in short, every affirmation which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain . . . Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not ascertained in the same manner, nor is our evidence of their truth, however great, of a like nature with the foregoing (IU, p. 40).

Both kinds of reasoning, then, demonstrative and probable, lead to the formation of a belief in a proposition.

Now the Reflectivist interpretation of Hume maintains that to morally evaluate x is to come to believe or assent to a proposition which asserts that contemplation of x from the moral point of view causes the experience of a certain moral sentiment; thus, to find x virtuous (or vicious) is to assent to a certain matter of fact proposition about x. Yet we come to believe such matter of fact propositions only as a result of matter of fact reasoning; and Hume explicitly denies that a moral evaluation is an instance of matter of fact reasoning.

This denial comes in the first section of Book III, "Moral Distinctions not deriv'd from Reason." One must be careful here, for Hume often is careless in making clear to which kind of reason he is referring. Sometimes by "reason" Hume means to refer to demonstrative reason only, as when he says "Reason or science is nothing but the comparing of ideas, and the discovery of their relations" (T, p. 466); at other times it is clear that by "reason" Hume means to refer to both demonstrative and probable reason, as when he says "we infer a cause immediately from its effect; and this inference is not only a true species of reasoning, but the strongest of all others" (T, p. 97 n.). However, Hume leaves no question that in the section of the Treatise we are now considering, "reason" refers to both demonstrative and probable reasoning:

> If the thought and understanding were alone capable of fixing the boundaries of right and wrong, the character of virtuous and vicious must lie in some relations of objects, or must be a matter of fact, which is discovered by our reasoning. This consequence is evident. As the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact; were virtue discover'd by the understanding; it must be an object of one of these operations (T, p. 463).

Hume then goes on to argue in the remainder of the section that to morally evaluate is not to engage in a process of reasoning.

> The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason (T, p. 457).
>
> Moral distinctions, therefore, are not the offspring of reason (T, p. 458).
>
> 'tis impossible, that the distinction betwixt moral good and evil, can be made by reason (T, p. 462).
>
> the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relation of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason (T, p. 470).

The actual examination of Hume's arguments for the conclusion that moral evaluations are not instances of either demonstrative or probable reasoning would lead me too far afield of my present purpose. What is important here is that Hume concludes that to morally evaluate is not to assent to or "discover" a proposition:

> Nor does this reasoning only prove, that morality consists not in any relations [i. e., relations of ideas], that are the objects of science [i. e., demonstrative reason]; but if examin'd, will prove with equal certainty, that it consists not

> in any matter of fact, which can be discover'd by the understanding (T, p. 468).

We must, then, reject the Reflectivist interpretation of Hume on moral evaluation. Though it may be shown that Hume is not successful in proving that a Reflectivist account of moral evaluation cannot be correct,[12] we can know that Hume's own account is not Reflectivist.

6

It appears that we have reached an impasse in the attempt to find a coherent interpretation of Hume on moral evaluation. If we take Hume's pronouncements at face value, we initially are led to adopt an Emotionist account, to the effect that an act of moral evaluation consists in the experiencing of a moral sentiment. But this interpretation cannot account for certain evaluations that Hume says we do make, in particular in those cases where the character or action to be evaluated is distant in time or place, or where we are unable to adopt the moral point of view. We than consider a Reflectivist interpretation, to the effect that an act of moral evaluation consists in the assent to a certain type of matter of fact proposition. This interpretation is able to explain how we can morally evaluate independently of the actual experience of a moral sentiment;

but we then find that it is in direct conflict with Hume's insistence that moral evaluations are not determinations of reason.

There are two conclusions which can be drawn. It may be that Hume does not give us a coherent theory of moral evaluation at all. Perhaps he really is maintaining either an Emotionist or a Reflectivist position, without realizing the inconsistencies thereby generated. If this is indeed the case, I think the weight of the evidence is on the side of holding that Hume is an Emotionist with respect to moral evaluations.

There is yet the second possibility: that Hume is describing a theory of moral evaluation, neither Emotionist nor Reflectivist, which explains those features of moral evaluation that the latter interpretations, taken singly, cannot. In what follows, I will attempt to work out such an interpretation. Its motivation stems primarily from a rather strong conviction that to adopt the first possibility without a struggle is to give up on Hume too quickly. My interpretation will rely on my account of Hume's moral sentiment, but it can be adapted to other accounts of the moral sentiment, including moral sense theories.

For Hume, the contents of moral evaluations are not true or false, for they are not objects of reason, or propositions. Nevertheless, he implies that some moral evaluations are better than

others, in that the former, when communicated, are more informative than the latter. For example, expressions of personal preference are of limited value to society at large. If I publicly announce that I like what Mr. A did, those who know me well might be able to glean from this some information about the general character of Mr. A's action - for instance, that it was helpful to me in my quest for power. However, those who are strangers to me can tell nothing about the general nature of Mr. A's action from my declaration of personal preference, for they know nothing about my personal tastes and interests.

Moral evaluations are more socially useful than evaluations based on personal factors because these very factors, which tend to vary from one individual to the next and which thereby tend to make our personal preferences differ, are screened out by adopting the moral point of view. Because, according to Hume, almost all men are similar in their capacity to sympathize with others and in their natural emotional reaction to personal pleasure or pain, and because moral evaluations are rooted in nothing more than these common qualities of man, when I communicate a moral evaluation of Mr. A's action it is as informative to a stranger as it is to a friend.

As we have seen, however, even if we adopt the moral point of view, our moral sentiments can be affected by distances in time

or place from that which is being evaluated. This introduces an element of variability into moral evaluations, one which is based on a purely personal and unique relation to that which is evaluated, much as personal tastes and interests introduce that large measure of variability so characteristic of non-moral evaluations. This element detracts from the social usefulness of moral evaluation; every individual occupies a unique spatio-temporal position, and unless we know this position of one who communicates a moral evaluation, the information we obtain about what kind of thing it is that is being evaluated will be limited.

Therefore, Hume implies, a moral evaluation which takes into account and corrects for this element of variability will be better than one which does not. Experience alone teaches us how to do this:

> In general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blam'd or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind. But these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking and dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain'd in one point of view. Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn and inalterable (T, p. 582).

Once again, however, we are faced with the task of giving an interpretation of Hume's view of the nature of moral evaluation, one that explains what it is to correct a moral evaluation. To do this, I be -

lieve, requires that we take very seriously Hume's contention that the correction of a moral evaluation is similar to the correction of a perceptual judgment:

> The case is here [in moral evaluations] the same as in our judgments concerning external bodies. All objects seem to diminish by their distance; But tho' the appearance of objects to our senses be the original standard, by which we judge of them, yet we do not say, that they actually diminish by the distance; but correcting the appearance by reflexion, arrive at a more constant and establish'd judgment concerning them. In like manner, tho' sympathy be much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and a sympathy with persons remote from us much fainter than that with persons near and contiguous; yet we neglect all these differences in our calm judgments concerning the characters of men . . . And tho' the heart does not always take part with those general notions, or regulate its love or hatred by them, yet are they sufficient for discourse, and serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the theatre, and in the schools (T, p. 603).

Hume's point about perceptual judgments seems to be the following. In attempting to judge of an external object, all anyone has to go on is his own impressions, or how the object appears to him. We soon learn by experience that our impressions of an object tend to undergo variations. Some of these variations we attribute to changes in the object itself, while others we attribute to changes in our perceptual relation to the object. We are able to draw such distinctions by comparing our impressions of the object to the impressions reported by observers whose perceptual relation to the object is constant.

Thus, as I get farther from an object, the object appears to me to get smaller. Yet, I do not take this as an indication that the object itself is getting smaller, because I've learned from experience that in similar circumstances, observers whose distance from the object remains constant experience no change in their perceptions of the object. Since the same object cannot both be getting smaller and not getting smaller, and since we assume that our impressions are of the same object, I attribute the change in my perceptions to the change in my relation to the object, rather than to a change in the object itself.

In judging of objects, according to Hume, we cannot hope to judge independently of our perceptions of the object. There is no reason for thinking that the appearance of largeness of a nearby object more closely resembles the actual object than does the appearance of smallness of the same object at a distance (though we can be sure that the change in the appearance of the object from large to small as we move farther away from it is not caused by any change in the object itself): it is just that we must adopt certain conventions in order to communicate effectively with others:

> In order, therefore, to prevent those continual contradictions, and arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we fix on some steady and general points of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation (T, pp. 581-582).

Thus, in describing the size of an object, we base our description on our perceptions when near to the object; in describing the color of an object, we base our description on our perceptions of the object when it is illuminated by white light. If we did not adopt such conventions, Hume argues, every man's description of the world would be purely subjective; your description of an object would give me no information on what to expect should I observe the same object from my own unique perceptual point of view. However, if you describe the object relative to a "conventional" point of view, I then get an idea of what I will perceive should I observe the object; this remains the case even if I do not observe the object from the conventional point of view, because experience teaches me how changes in perceptual relations to an object alter the impressions of the object.

Let us consider a specific example. Suppose I am several yards away from a fire, so that I feel only a slight warmth from it. This sensation of slight warmth that I experience is an impression; as such, Hume tells us, its strength and vivacity is automatically of such a degree as to constitute belief.[13] Moreover, Hume considers the reaching of any belief, propositional or not, an act of judgment; thus, all sensations are, for Hume, perceptual judgments[14]:

> Thus it appears, that the <u>belief</u> or <u>assent</u>, which always

> attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present . . . To believe is in this case to feel an immediate impression of the senses . . . 'Tis merely the force and liveliness of the perception, which constitutes the first act of judgment . . . (T, p. 86).
>
> The only existences of which we are certain, are perceptions, which being immediately present to us by consciousness, command our strongest assent, and are the first foundation of all our conclusions (T, p. 212).

But experience teaches me how to "correct" this initial perceptual judgment by appealing to the impressions which would be experienced from the conventional point of view - and in the case of sensible objects the conventional point of view is one of proximity, under "standard" conditions. I know from experience the kind of sensation I have when I am very close to a fire; that is, in Hume's terminology, when I imagine myself close to a fire, I am immediately presented with an idea of a certain kind of painful sensation.

> All objects seem to diminish by their distance: But tho' the appearance of objects to our senses be the original standard, by which we judge of them, yet we do not say, that they actually diminish by the distance; but correcting the appearance by reflexion, arrive at a more constant and establish'd judgment concerning them (T, p. 603).

By "correcting the appearance by reflexion" Hume means arriving at the idea of certain impressions (namely, those which would be experienced by the perceiver while maintaining a certain conventional point of view) via a process of probable reasoning.

Hume maintains that we correct our aesthetic judgments in the same manner as we do our perceptual judgments:

> ... external beauty is determin'd merely by pleasure; and 'tis evident, a beautiful countenance cannot give so much pleasure, when seen at the distance of twenty paces, as when it is brought nearer us. We say not, however, that it appears to us less beautiful: Because we know what effect it will have in such a position, and by that reflection we correct its momentary appearance (T, p. 582).

Our initial impression of pleasure must count as an aesthetic judgment. However, experience has taught us what to expect in the way of pleasurable sentiments should we perceive such a countenance in close proximity - that is, when we imagine ourselves to perceive the countenance from a closer point of view, we are immediately presented with the idea of a greater pleasure. This idea serves as a corrected aesthetic judgment, and if we have need to communicate our judgment to another, it is this idea that we refer to rather than to the initial impression of pleasure.

What, then, is Hume's theory of moral evaluation? I believe it is as follows. When I contemplate a certain character or action, and I experience a moral sentiment (or lack of a moral sentiment), I have thereby morally evaluated or judged the character or action. Thus, the Emotionist interpretation is so far correct. Where the Emotionist account goes wrong is in assuming that all moral evalua-

tions for Hume are of this type. This is similar to the error of assuming that all perceptual judgments for Hume consist in the experiencing of sensations. However, as I have tried to show, corrected perceptual judgments consist in an idea rather than an impression. Similarly, Hume argues that there are corrected moral evaluations. I correct my initial moral sentiment by imagining how the character or action would affect me emotionally should I be directly acquainted with it and should I adopt the moral point of view; the corrected moral evaluation consists in the resulting idea of a moral sentiment.

Let us consider a specific example. Imagine that I read a newspaper account of a thief in Australia who steals only from the rich. My initial reaction is one of approval, for I take pleasure in seeing the rich suffer a bit. But I then adopt the moral point of view, and screen out my jealousy of the rich; in sympathizing with the unpleasantness experienced by the victims, I too experience unpleasantness, and this becomes the object of an aversion, which is a moral sentiment. I now have made a moral evaluation. However, Australia is far away and I feel very little association with it or its inhabitants; moreover, the brief newspaper account gives no details about the victims, and I can only imagine what these faceless people are going through. These things together lessen my ability to

sympathize with the victims, and as a result, my sympathetic pain and consequent aversion, or moral sentiment, are quite weak.

However, I am aware that my moral sentiments can be affected this way, and so I endeavor to correct my initial evaluation. There have been numerous times in my life when I have been in close proximity to acts of theft; I have witnessed them, or have had close friends who have been robbed, or perhaps have committed such acts myself. In each of these cases, when I have contemplated the act from the moral point of view, I have experienced a very strong moral sentiment. When I correct my initial judgment of the man in Australia, I imagine that I am close to his deeds and I imagine also that, while in that position, I contemplate his deeds from the moral point of view. Because experience has taught me how I am affected under such circumstances, I am led to the idea of a strong aversion.[15] This then is an idea of a moral sentiment because the idea is of an aversion which follows adoption of the moral point of view.

This very idea of an intense moral sentiment now serves as my corrected moral evaluation of the man in Australia. If I wish to describe the degree of viciousness of the man and his deeds, it is this idea of a strong moral sentiment which serves as the basis for my description, rather than the rather weak moral sentiment which constitutes my initial moral evaluation. It might now appear as

though the Reflectivist interpretation is accurate so far as corrected moral evaluations go, but this is not the case. According to the Reflectivist, a moral evaluation for Hume consists in a proposition which connects the idea of a certain contemplation to the idea of a certain sentiment. However, I am arguing that a corrected moral evaluation consists in an idea of a certain sentiment alone. The content of a moral evaluation for Hume, then, can consist in an impression or it can consist in an idea of that impression. The former I shall call an "original" evaluation, while the latter I will refer to as a "corrected" evaluation.

So far, I have given the following picture of what occurs when we correct a moral evaluation. Initially, we adopt the moral point of view, and contemplate a certain character or action. We then experience a certain degree of moral sentiment. However, we realize that this initial, or "original," evaluation might be affected by our distance in space or time from that which is evaluated; we then set out to correct the initial evaluation. We imagine that we are contemplating the same character or action from the moral point of view, and also that we are directly acquainted with the character or action. Our imagination, by a customary transition, then produces an idea of a certain degree of propensity or aversion, and this idea now constitutes the corrected moral evaluation.

Yet, it is clear that this same process may be undergone without the initial or original moral evaluation. For instance, it is quite common to find ourselves unable to adopt the moral point of view in certain circumstances. Suppose my brother commits a crime; in evaluating this action I would be a rare person indeed if I could separate myself from the intense personal influences involved. Since I cannot adopt the moral point of view, I cannot experience a moral sentiment; that is, I cannot make what I have been calling an "original" evaluation.

However, as I interpret Hume, it is still possible in such a case to make what I have been calling a "corrected" moral evaluation. I can imagine myself contemplating this act from the moral point of view. Experience has taught me what to expect as a result of such a contemplation: I am presented, via the mental habit, with the idea of a strong sentiment of aversion. This idea, then, constitutes a negative moral evaluation of my brother and his action, even though all my actual sentiments toward my brother may be positive. It is this idea to which I refer should I express a moral evaluation of my brother's action:

> The passions do not always follow our corrections; but these corrections serve sufficiently to regulate our abstract notions, and are alone regarded, when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue (T, p. 585).

There is also another sense of correcting a moral evaluation, one which Hume says very little about. Such a correction can come about when, after morally evaluating a certain character or action (either in an original or a corrected evaluation), we get new information about the kind of character or action it is. For instance, my friend's ethnic jokes might amuse me, and I might mistakenly believe that they amuse others as well. I can adopt the moral point of view, and sympathize with the pleasures that I imagine my friend's joke telling brings to others. The subsequent pleasurable propensity that I experience is a moral sentiment, and constitutes an original moral evaluation. However, I may find out that, in fact, my friend's jokes are disagreeable to others. If I now adopt the moral point of view, my sympathy with these others will cause me to share in their displeasure, and my moral sentiment will be one of aversion. Although this evaluation too would be original in that it is the experience of an actual sentiment, it can be considered to be an improved evaluation in that it stems from a better understanding of the effects of that which is being evaluated. Still, it cannot be said that the first evaluation is false, and the second true, because the content of neither is a propositional belief.

Hume gives a similar example of such a correction in An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals:

> In all determinations of morality, this circumstance of public utility is ever principally in view; and wherever disputes arise, either in philosophy or common life, concerning the bounds of duty, the question cannot, by any means, be decided with greater certainty than by ascertaining, on any side, the true interests of mankind. If any false opinion, embraced from appearances, has been found to prevail, as soon as further experience and sounder reasoning have given us juster notions of human affairs, we retract our first sentiment and adjust anew the boundaries of moral good and evil.
> Giving alms to common beggars is naturally praised, because it seems to carry relief to the distressed and indigent. But when we observe the encouragement thence arising to idleness and debauchery, we regard that species of charity rather as a weakness than a virtue (I, pp. 12-13).

There is one important difference between corrected perceptual judgments and corrected moral evaluations (that is, those that consist in an idea rather than a sentiment): the former are comprised of beliefs whereas the latter are not. An impression of an object constitutes a perceptual judgment, as, for example, the sensation of slight warmth from a distant fire. By a habit of imagination we are soon drawn to a lively idea of intense heat, and this lively idea constitutes a belief:

> All belief of matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object present to the memory or senses and a customary conjunction between that and some other object; or, in other words, having found, in many instances, that any two kinds of objects, flame and heat, snow and cold, have always been conjoined together: if flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold, and to believe that such a quality does exist and will discover itself upon a nearer approach (IU, p. 60).

This lively idea or belief is the corrected perceptual judgment; but Hume insists that an impression of the object is necessary to give the consequent idea intensity enough to be belief:

> ... I make a third set of experiments, in order to know, whether anything be requisite, beside the customary transition, towards the production of this phaenomenon of belief. I therefore change the first impression into an idea; and observe, that tho' the customary transition to the correlative idea still remains, yet there is in reality no belief nor persuasion. A present impression, then, is absolutely requisite to this whole operation (T, p. 103).

If I merely imagine a fire, that is, if I have an idea of a fire which is not a belief, the "customary transition" in my imagination will still take place, and I will receive the idea of intense heat; but since the initial perception was an idea rather than an impression, the consequent idea will not be a belief.

When I correct a moral evaluation, I do not start with an impression. Rather, I begin with an idea (one which is not a belief) of a certain contemplation of an action or character from a certain spatio-temporal position. Experience has taught me that when I do actually so contemplate similar actions or characters from that position, a certain sentiment follows; that is, I have a mental habit of expectation borne from custom. Thus, when I begin with the idea of that contemplation, I am led to the idea of that certain sentiment; but since this transition is from idea to idea rather than from

impression to idea, the consequent idea of the sentiment is not a belief.

So far as corrected moral evaluations are concerned, then, the Reflectivist interpretation is wrong on two counts. In the first place, I have tried to show that a corrected moral evaluation is not a belief in or assent to a cause and effect proposition. But not only is the Reflectivist wrong about what is believed in a corrected moral evaluation - he is wrong in maintaining that there is belief involved at all.[16]

7

Both the Emotionist and the Reflectivist interpretations have strong points in their favor; but they each have weaknesses which, I believe, are sufficient for rejecting them as accurate accounts of Hume's theory of moral evaluation. In the last section I have given a new interpretation, and in the present section I wish to examine whether or not this interpretation shares the strengths while avoiding the weaknesses of the two common interpretations.

The Emotionist account was attractive in that it provided for the intimate connection that Hume believes to hold between moral evaluation and action. On my interpretation this connection still holds for "original" moral evaluations, for here my account is the

same as the Emotionist: such evaluations consist in the experience of the moral sentiment.

However, on my interpretation a corrected moral evaluation consists in the having of an idea of a certain sentiment, rather than in the experiencing of the sentiment itself. But an idea which is not a belief is motivationally neutral, and cannot affect our passions or actions (T, pp. 118 ff.); thus, it seems, a corrected moral evaluation does not display that connection between evaluation and action which,we have up to now assumed, Hume demands of all moral evaluations. Yet, if we read Hume carefully, it becomes apparent that he does not demand this connection in corrected moral evaluations:

> But however the general principle of our blame or praise may be corrected by these other principles, 'tis certain, they are not altogether efficacious, nor do our passions often correspond entirely to the present tneory (T, p. 583).
>
> The passions do not always follow our corrections (T, p. 585).
>
> Sentiments must touch the heart [i. e., be experienced as impressions], to make them controul our passions; But they need not extend beyond the imagination [i. e., be experienced as ideas], to make them influence our taste (T, p. 586).

We found the Emotionist interpretation to be inadequate because it could not explain what Hume means by the correction of moral evaluations, nor could it explain how it is that we can make

a moral evaluation without feeling a moral sentiment. This difficulty is overcome by the new interpretation, according to which a corrected moral evaluation is an idea of a sentiment rather than a sentiment itself.

The Reflectivist interpretation had the advantage of being able to explain the correction of moral evaluations, and how we can make a moral evaluation without feeling a moral sentiment. My interpretation too has this capacity. But the Reflectivist account had to be rejected because it is clearly inconsistent with Hume's contentions to the effect that to make a moral evaluation is not to come to believe, or assent to, a proposition. My interpretation overcomes this difficulty as well. An original moral evaluation, on this interpretation, consists in an impression; and though, on Hume's theory, all impressions are beliefs, they are not what might be called "propositional beliefs." A corrected moral evaluation consists in an idea of a sentiment, an idea which is produced by the same type of mental habit which underlies probable reasoning; but unlike probable reasoning, which begins with an impression and terminates in propositional belief, a corrected moral evaluation

begins with an idea (of a certain act of contemplation) and terminates with an idea (of a certain sentiment) which is not belief.

Therefore, my interpretation does seem to combine the strengths of the Emotionist and the Reflectivist interpretations, while at the same time avoiding those inadequacies which caused their ultimate rejections.

8

My primary concern to this point has been with an examination of what constitutes a moral evaluation for Hume, rather than with interpreting Hume on moral discourse. There is good reason for this: I do not find any theory of moral language in Hume. Árdal, among others, agrees with me here:

> In the Treatise, Hume explains the nature and origin of evaluations; but he is not concerned with evaluative language ... Hume does not give us, in the Treatise, a theory of moral language, but an account of the nature and origin of evaluations. If Ethics is defined as the analysis of moral discourse, Hume's Treatise does not contain much in the way of Ethics. What it does contain is an account of the way the concepts of virtue and vice have their source in human emotions[17]

That Hume avoids linguistic analysis should not be surprising if we remind ourselves of what Hume is attempting to accomplish in the Treatise and in the Inquiries which followed: the development

of a "science of human nature." The full title of the Treatise itself affirms this. Now the use of language is a characteristic of human nature; but the use of a particular language, or of particular linguistic expressions (and the concepts they express), is not. Thus, linguistic analysis, unless it be concerned with discovering structural similarities in all languages, does not have a place in Hume's philosophy.

What does occupy such a place, however, is a study "of the understanding" and "of the passions," elements which are common to all humankind; and one of the most important of the passions is the moral sentiment: "The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it" (I, p. 93). It is the study of this moral sentiment, and of its role in moral "opinions or decisions," that Hume finds to be the proper object of study for a philosopher of morals. Those philosophers who pay too much attention to language "encroach upon the province of grammarians and ... engage in disputes of words, while they imagine that they are handling controversies of the deepest importance and concern" (I, pp. 127-128).

Of course, it is entirely possible, and perhaps probable,

that Hume did have a theory about how moral evaluations are communicated. If there are any signs of such a theory in what Hume has given us, it seems to me that these signs are most easily interpreted as pointing to some form of emotive theory of moral utterances, for Hume occasionally talks of "expressing" our moral sentiments or "communicating" them.[18] On my interpretation of Hume on moral evaluation, this emotivism would have to be of a strangely modified form; what I've called an original evaluation would be communicated by expressing a moral sentiment, but a corrected evaluation would have to be communicated by expressing an idea (or concept) of a moral sentiment.

It would be natural, then, to ask how we could know whether another's communicated moral evaluation was an expression of a sentiment or of an idea of a sentiment. The answer, assuming that the other's utterance is all we have to go one, seems to be that we cannot know. But that does not matter for Hume, for in either case we are gaining the same information about the thing evaluated: namely, that it is the kind of thing which when contemplated from the moral point of view, and from a spatio-temporal proximity, causes in the judger a moral sentiment.[19] That is why Hume can maintain that corrected moral evaluations are "sufficient for discourse."

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[1]Frankena, pp. 91-92.

[2]Lenz. p. xvi.

[3]Árdal, pp. 194 ff.

[4]There are exceptions: "Beside good and evil, or in other words, pain and pleasure, the direct passions frequently arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly unaccountable. Of this kind is the desire of punishment to our enemies, and of happiness to our friends; hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites. These passions, properly speaking, produce good and evil, and proceed not from them, like the other affections" (T, p. 439).

[5]As we have seen, Hume often insists that the moral sentiment itself is a pleasure or pain, but I have tried to show the inconsistency in this.

[6]Hunter, p. 62.

[7]Kydd, p. 172.

[8] Ibid., p. 172.

[9]Hume denies that there is any idea of existence as such. To believe in the existence of x is, for Hume, to have an intense idea, or conception, of x, where that intensity approximates that of an impression (T, pp. 94-95, pp. 96-97 n.).

[10]It is odd that Hume here allows that memory can provide us with a "repetition" of a former impression of sensation, for he previously leads us to believe that the memory generates lively ideas, or beliefs, rather than actual impressions (T, pp. 8-9).

[11]Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy (Oxford: 1972), pp. 60-69).

[12]The kernel of Hume's argument is contained in the following:

> Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason (T, p. 457).

Hume means to include by "reason" here both demonstrative and probable reason. But Hume admits that probable reason, unlike demonstrative, can "prompt" or excite passions. For instance, I am walking along a country road when I see a juicy red apple on a tree. Probable reason informs me that eating this apple would be a pleasant experience, and I come to experience the direct passion of desire toward the apple. Certainly this must count as a case of reason exciting a passion (T, p. 459), and thus one of Hume's premisses is, by his own account, false.

Hume seems to realize this, for he next argues that, though probable reason can excite passions in certain cases, nobody has ever considered such reasonings to be either moral or immoral.

> A person may be affected with passion, by supposing a pain or pleasure to lie in an object, which has no tendency to produce either of these sensations, or which produces the contrary to what is imagin'd . . . But tho' this be acknowledg'd, 'tis easy to observe, that these errors are so far from being the source of all immorality, that they are commonly very innocent, and bring no manner of guilt upon the person who is so unfortunate as to fall into them. They extend not beyond a mistake of fact, which moralists have not generally suppos'd criminal (T, p. 459).

> Reason and judgment may, indeed, be the mediate cause of an action, by prompting, or by directing a passion: But it is not pretended, that a judgment of this kind, either in its truth or falshood, is attended with virtue or vice (T, p. 462).

But Hume is confused here. When he states that "morals excite passions," he is referring to moral evaluations or judgments; for instance, my judgment that stealing is wrong can excite passions in me, and prevent me from committing such an act. Hume now wants to show that such evaluations cannot be matters of probable reasoning. He attempts to show this by arguing that judgments of probable reason are never themselves judged to be virtuous or vicious. However, this is entirely consistent with moral judgments themselves being judgments of probable reason. Hume cannot show that moral

evaluations are not probable reasonings by showing that acts of probable reasonings are not morally evaluated.
For another and much more detailed examination of Hume's argument that "the rules of morality . . . are not conclusions of our reason," see Rachael M. Kydd's Reason and Conduct in Hume's Treatise.

[13]Belief, then, need not necessarily be reached by reasoning; all impressions, whether of sensation or reflection, are beliefs. It is important to notice, however, a crucial difference in beliefs reached through reason and those which are impressions. A reasoned belief is a lively idea, and can be expressed propositionally. An impression, however, can not be expressed propositionally. Still, for Hume there is only one kind of belief, and this is because belief is defined by him in terms of the vivacity or intensity of a mental content, a content being either an impression or an idea.

[14]For Hume, then, to judge is not necessarily an act of the understanding.

[15]The following should not be confused. My idea of an impression can be of varying intensity; if it is intense enough, it constitutes a belief in the existence of the impression. But my idea is also of a more or less intense impression; that is, my idea is of an impression that has a certain intensity. I can have an idea of a slight headache, or I can have an idea of one that is severe.

[16]This is not to say that we cannot come to believe, after making a corrected moral evaluation, the proposition that a certain contemplation would cause a certain sentiment. But the act of making a corrected moral evaluation is not itself the assent to such a proposition.

[17]Árdal, p. 190 and p. 212.

[18]See, for instance, T, p. 582; I, p. 93; I, p. 95.

[19]In the case of an original evaluation, contemplation of the character or action is actually causing a moral sentiment, whereas in the case of a corrected evaluation, the character or action is of a kind whose contemplation from the moral point of view has caused the moral sentiment in the past, and thus formed that mental habit which is the basis of the corrected evaluation.

CHAPTER VII

HUME'S ETHICS: AN OVERVIEW

1

No detailed interpretation of Hume's ethical theory can be considered complete without a discussion of the by now notorious passage of the Treatise which reads as follows:

> I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason (T, pp. 469-470).

This passage is of both historical and contemporary importance. On the one hand, a proper interpretation of the passage requires

a proper interpretation of the whole of Hume's ethics. On the other hand, the question of whether or not, or how, moral judgments are related to factual judgments is still very much a live issue. A discussion of this passage, then, makes a useful and fitting final chapter to this thesis, because any proposed interpretation of Hume's ethics should provide a coherent interpretation of the passage; and once we understand what Hume is saying here, we have some basis for placing Hume in the ancient, but still active, controversy of fact versus value.

The mistake I believe Hume is charging to all the other systems of morality with which he's met is the assumption that the content of a moral judgment is a proposition.[1] What these other systems attempt to do is to give arguments or proofs for various moral judgments. Now, quite justifiably, these other systems also assume that moral propositions are in some way different from those that express matters of fact or relations of ideas. For Hume, however, all propositions express either relations of ideas or matters of fact. So, Hume is demanding that these other systems make clear just what this new kind of proposition is, that it be "observ'd and explain'd."

But Hume's attack does not stop there. There are two kinds of proof for Hume. A demonstrative proof employs demonstrative

reasoning, and involves the comparison of ideas. Such reasoning will have as premisses propositions which are relations of ideas, and its conclusion must also be a proposition which is a relation of ideas. A probable proof employs probable reasoning, and is based on those mental habits which are generated by experience. Such reasoning will have as premisses at least one proposition which is a matter of fact, and its conclusion must also be a matter of fact. So Hume is issuing this further challenge to the other systems: "Let me, for the moment, allow you your new kind of proposition. You seem to maintain that such a proposition can be proved, employing as premisses propositions which are either relations of ideas or matters of fact. But so far as I know, there are only two methods of proof or reasoning; and as long as we have as premisses propositions which are either relations of ideas or matters of fact, the conclusions we can reach by proof must be either relations of ideas or matters of fact. Show me, then, how your new kind of proposition can be proved, or deduced, from ordinary propositions as premisses." Hume concludes that if the defenders of the other systems would try to meet these challenges, their ultimate failure would force them to see that moral evaluations are not "perceiv'd by reason" - that is, they are not propositions at all.

To make a moral evaluation for Hume, as I have tried to show, is not to assent to a proposition: it is to experience a certain sentiment, or to have an idea of that sentiment. A proof, or deduction, is for Hume a process of reasoning (either demonstrative or probable) which generates "assurance," or belief, in a proposition. Because to morally evaluate is not to assent to or come to believe a proposition, Hume's theory denies that a moral judgment can be arrived at by a deduction.

Now the question of the relation between fact and moral value is often regarded as the question of the autonomy of ethics, and the nature of this latter question is often obscured by the ambiguity of the term "autonomy." It seems to me that those who use this term usually have in mind one of two different meanings. According to the first, to say that ethics is autonomous is to say that moral evaluations cannot be inferred (or, in Hume's terminology, "deduced") from non-moral premisses. In this sense of the word, Hume indeed is maintaining the autonomy of ethics.

But according to the second sense, to say that ethics is autonomous is to say that the act of making a moral evaluation is no more than contingently related to the experiencing of certain sentiments or attitudes. Hume's ethics is not autonomous in this sense, for Hume maintains that to experience a moral sentiment

is logically equivalent to making a moral evaluation (at least, an original moral evaluation).

2

Contemporary philosophers of ethics must find a kindred spirit in Hume, for his ethical theory is primarily meta-ethical in nature. What Hume is attempting to provide is an analysis of the nature of moral evaluation: when one morally evaluates, precisely what is one doing? That is the central question for Hume; and he believes it is to be answered only by observing actual instances of such evaluation:

> We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension (T, p. xix).

What Hume finds is that to make an original moral evaluation is to experience a certain kind of sentiment. In this he presages what has come to be called the "noncognitivist" theory of moral judgment, a theory which denies that moral evaluations are judgments that something is the case. On such a theory, moral

judgments have no truth value. So it is with Hume, for feelings are not the sort of things which are true or false:

> Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact . . . Now 'tis evident our passions . . . are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement . . . 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false (T, p. 458).

But perhaps no other moral philosopher has examined in such great detail the nature of this moral sentiment. In the Treatise, we found the moral sentiment, as I interpret it, to be the instinctive propensity or aversion toward (sympathetic) pleasures or pains, consequent to adopting the moral point of view. Now Hume is sometimes accused of unjustifiably assuming that all (or almost all) people who are fully informed as to the facts concerning x will make the same moral judgment about x; and I think that people look for this assumption in Hume because they think he needs it to make his theory of moral evaluation coherent.[2] Yet Hume needs this assumption only if his theory is that a moral judgment is a factual judgment about how all, or most people, properly informed and objective, would feel about the thing evaluated. This, I have tried to show, is not his theory.

Nevertheless, it is true that if there were not a general

uniformity in the way people react to similar things, moral discourse would break down. The utility of moral discourse does depend on a general uniformity in the way people react emotionally to similar things when regarded from similar points of view. If there were not this uniformity, the moral judgments of others, even though made from the moral point of view, would give me no information whatever about the things evaluated; some people might experience the moral sentiment of approval upon contemplating acts of cruelty, while others might experience the moral sentiment of disapprobation from acts of kindness. Thus, the expression of the moral sentiment of approval or disapprobation would become useless as an indicator of the nature of the thing evaluated; the expressions of moral judgments would convey no more than autobiographical information. Moral discourse would lose that social function which is its real value.

But Hume does not need to assume that most all factually informed people will make the same moral judgments, for his theory of the moral sentiment as given in the Treatise provides for its truth. It is a matter of fact, confirmable by observation, that almost all men have the capacity to sympathize with others, though to varying degrees. Hume finds this ability to sympathize to be a universal element in human nature. Nor can it be disputed

that most all men have an instinctive propensity for pleasure and aversion to pain. But these facts, together with Hume's theory of the moral sentiment (in the Treatise) guarantee that most all men, who are fully informed and who have adopted the moral point of view, will make similar moral judgments. In this way the social usefulness of moral discourse is retained within Hume's theory, without the need of an apparently unwarranted assumption.

3

My main concern in this thesis has been historical, rather than critical. We must understand what Hume is saying before we can evaluate what he says. However, I propose, in this last section, to devote some time to this latter task.

In terms of exposition, I find Hume's work to be highly erratic. For instance, his work on induction, in both the Treatise and An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, is a marvelously clear piece of philosophy. Yet, his ethics suffers by comparison. The many different interpretations that have been given of his ethical theory is ample evidence of this. Hume just does not make it clear what he takes a moral sentiment to be, nor how this sentiment is related to a moral judgment. My interpretation seems to me to make the most sense of what Hume says; even so, it raises many

questions.

For instance, what motivates Hume to adopt a moral sense theory in An Inquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, after he has devoted so much of the Treatise to working out an alternate account of the moral sentiment? Is it merely a retreat from the "ardor of youth"? Now we know that Hume's lost confidence in mental associationism primarily is responsible for his abandoning the attempt to explain the mechanism of sympathy, treating sympathy in the Inquiry as an ultimate principle. This notwithstanding, he still could have followed the scheme of the Treatise, where the moral sentiment is treated as the emotional reaction to sympathetic pleasures and pains. There seems to have been no need for Hume to adopt a moral sense theory in the Inquiry, as I believe he does. In light of Hume's antipathy toward the adoption of unnecessary ultimate principles, this transition from the Treatise to the Inquiry is all the more puzzling.

Hume seems to hold the same theory of moral evaluation in both the Treatise and the Inquiry. But the weakest part of this theory is the account of the correction of moral evaluations. As I have interpreted this part of Hume's theory, a corrected moral evaluation consists in the idea of a moral sentiment; and I believe that this is the only way to interpret what Hume means here, without

contradicting his denial that a moral evaluation involves propositional belief, and without ignoring his statements to the effect that we can make a moral evaluation without having the moral sentiment.

But a theory which holds that a moral evaluation can consist in an idea of a moral sentiment hardly seems satisfactory. The moral sentiment itself, whether on the account of the Treatise or on that of the Inquiry, cannot be experienced by an act of the will, any more than can physical pain on Hume's theory. Thus, when an act of moral evaluation is taken to consist in the experiencing of a moral sentiment, as Hume does for original evaluations, we get as a result that one cannot make whatever kind of moral evaluation one wishes with respect to a certain character or action; and this is certainly a desired result, if moral discourse is to have any social usefulness whatever. But if an act of moral evaluation can consist in the having of an idea of a moral sentiment, one can, it seems, make whatever moral judgment one wishes with respect to a certain character or action, for Hume tells us "The mind has the command over all its ideas, and can separate, unite, mix, and vary them, as it pleases" (T, pp. 623-624), and "The imagination has the command over all its ideas, and can join, and mix, and vary them in all the ways possible" (T, p. 629).

Let us again consider a specific case. My brother commits an act of murder; I wish to pass a moral evaluation, but I find myself unable to take the moral point of view. I cannot then experience a moral sentiment, and thus cannot make an original moral evaluation. But, according to Hume, I can make a corrected moral evaluation. I imagine myself adopting the moral point of view and contemplating my brother's action. What happens next, as I interpret Hume, is that I am presented, via a mental habit, with the idea of that feeling which has in the past followed contemplations of similar actions. This feeling, presumably, would be an aversion, and my idea of this aversion now counts as a corrected moral evaluation.

The difficulty with this, however, is that, if I wish, I can imagine (that is, form the idea of) any feeling to follow the contemplation of this act from the moral point of view, including a pleasurable propensity; that is, it seems, I can overcome any mental habit I might have in this respect by an act of the will. This being so, it seems that I can make whatever corrected moral evaluation of my brother's action that I please. It is clear that such a possibility destroys the very purpose of corrected moral evaluations, which is to "correct the momentary appearance of things, and overlook our present situation" (T, p. 582).

Hume's difficulty is the result of two intuitions that he never

successfully reconciles: that moral evaluation is ultimately rooted in human feeling, and that human feeling alone cannot provide a suitable foundation for the social usefulness, or objectivity, of moral discourse. Hume's account of the correction of moral evaluations is the focal point of this failure. Yet, we should not allow this to color our estimate of Hume as a moral philosopher, for if we consider philosophy to be a certain kind of mental activity, undergone with a very special dedication of spirit, Hume is a philosopher par excellence:

> When we see, that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented ... And as this impossibility of making any farther progress is enough to satisfy the reader, so the writer may derive a more delicate satisfaction from the free confession of his ignorance, and from his prudence in avoiding that error, into which so many have fallen, of imposing their conjectures and hypotheses on the world for the most certain principles. When this mutual contentment and satisfaction can be obtained betwixt master and scholar, I know not what more we can require of our philosophy (T, p. xviii).

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[1]For an excellent sampling of the variety of interpretations given of this passage, see the collection of articles on this topic in Hume, ed. V. C. Chappell, (Notre Dame: 1968), pp. 240-307).

[2]See, for instance, C. L. Stevenson's Ethics and Language (New Haven: 1975), pp. 274-275.

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